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# DETECTIVE TALES

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# DETECTIVE

## TALES

12 STORIES 15 CENTS

VOL. THIRTY-FOUR

OCTOBER, 1946

NUMBER THREE

### Two Feature-Length Murder-Novels

1. **STAY AS DEAD AS YOU ARE!**.....*Day Keene* 8  
—screamed Private Eye Dan Mercer to the corpse who came back with a case full of diamonds, the gal named Zola, and a crude idea that Mercer knew entirely too much to keep on living!
2. **DON'T LOOK NOW—IT'S MURDER!**.....*W. T. Ballard* 60  
—only it's got to look like an accident—and if it doesn't, Costa, you will!

### Two Thrilling Detective Novelettes

3. **THREE THOUSAND FALSE PROPHETS**.....*Alan Rittner Anderson* 38  
—couldn't be wrong about a man they were sure was a wife-killer.
4. **KILLERS' CARNIVAL**.....*Joel Reeve* 82  
—took over Little Doc's show for a dazzling one-night stand that nearly put Doc out of this world!

### Five Compelling Short Stories

5. **KNUCKLE-BUSTER**.....*Russell Branch* 26  
—stick to your racket of jumbling hot heaps. Don't get ideas, pal, because murder is a job that takes more than a 5/8ths wrench to handle!
  6. **KILL 'EM WITH KINDNESS!**.....*Robert C. Dennis* 31  
—was his motto, and he was the kind of guy who could actually make it work!
  7. **TAKE A DEEP BREATH**.....*Daniel Gordon* 49  
—Jimmy, because this is the last time down. . . . And it would be better for you if you never came up again!
  8. **MEDAL FOR MAYHEM**.....*Don James* 53  
—was Bill Bray's reward which was almost as strange as the double-kill it took to get it.
  9. **DEADFALL**.....*Henry Norton* 77  
—it most certainly would be. The question was, whose?—the Sing Sing kill-artist's. . . . Or Sam O'Dell's?
- AND—
10. **ODDITIES IN CRIME**.....*Lee and Jakobson* 6  
One crook will always remember that bolt from the blue!
  11. **THE FINGER POINTS TO MURDER!**.....*Stookie Allen* 37  
It's a strange ranch-land kill-case which you may be able to solve!
  12. **THE CRIME CLINIC**.....*A Department* 97

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AGAINST REPRINT FICTION

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# ODDITIES IN CRIME

by LEE and JAKOBSSON



← Born in humble circumstances, Margaret McKinney Toomey Paddleford Robertson Fawcett married and conned her way through the social register and international society—not to mention more millions of dollars than you or I would care to shake a stick at—until she was finally caught in Seattle in 1936 and sent to the Walla Walla pen for 15 years.

Forced at last to deal with the law, Margaret turned detective. With the aid of a fake priest she got to visit her in jail, she got her cellmate, motherly old Mary Ellen Smith, who was serving time for a lesser rap, to confess to a hitherto unsuspected series of cold-blooded, nationwide killings, implicating her monstrous son, Decasto Mayer. Mrs. Smith was tried and convicted—and Decasto committed suicide.

And at last, reports, authorities were feeling very kindly toward the million dollar baby who once led them a merry chase all over the world!

Among others, Chicago boasted a "Dawn Bandit," → in the years just preceding the war—a youthful stick-up man who specialized in holding up all-night establishments in the small hours. In the Windy City this was no special distinction, but in one respect the Dawn Bandit differed from others. There was one cop on the force who knew who he was.

Detective Ernest L. Keen managed to get in touch with the bandit by phone, asked him to surrender. The other replied he'd shoot it out with anybody who tried to arrest him. So Detective Keen set a trap for him, baiting it with the bandit's wife—and in the ensuing gun battle the Dawn Bandit fell dead.

His name was Harold Keen. His relationship to Detective Keen—son!



← Called to treat a man who had been struck by lightning, a noted Viennese physician was astonished to find his own initials neatly branded on the patient's hip by the bolt from the blue. The elaborate monogram seemed familiar to him—and in the patient's hip pocket, he found the expensive, initialed wallet a pickpocket had stolen from him a year ago. The patient confessed—and the doc fixed up the burn!

Whadda they mean—crime doesn't pay? Maybe it → doesn't pay the something under 4,000,000 known hard-working criminals (roughly 1 out of every twenty-odd voters) in these United States, but with the government crime is a big and lucrative business. New York State alone netted more than one and a quarter million dollars through confiscated goods (narcotics and other contraband), plus fines—in just one year! Uncle Sam does even better. Just the smashing of one diamond smuggling ring gave the feds the price of running the U. S. prosecutor's office for a full year!

Taxation without representation, that's what it is—and those four million jerks get sent to jail periodically, too! We'll stay as honest as we can, thanks.





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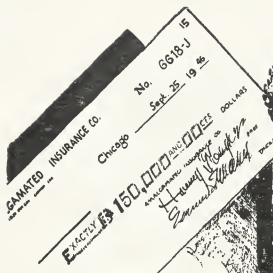
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*"Don't steal peanuts," advised Private Eye Dan Mercer. But his sermon came home to roost with a huge glittering diamond—and his own death-sentence—clamped tight in its teeth!*

## CHAPTER ONE

The Gleasons Are Coming . . .

THE night, for October, was warm. There was no wind. Even that high up in Central Bureau sweat trickled down Murphy's cheeks and glistened on his bald spot as he filled in the complaint sheet. The blonde continued to curse me—

"You dirty stooge . . . You rotten leech . . . You stinking, filthy, shamus. I hope you enjoy your blood money. Why couldn't you give us a pass?"

Those weren't the words she used but that was the general idea. A matron tried to shut her up without success. Archer's wife continued to sob on my shoulder. He sat staring at the floor. I knew what he was thinking. He was wondering if it had been worth it. I doubted it greatly. Distant pastures may look greener but grass is much the same no matter where it grows.

I was still waiting for my receipt when Haig of Homicide came in and wanted to know what I had.

I said, "A defaulting cashier."

It was the same old story. Archer, with



The girl who was running the cage turned around. She begged, "Don't shoot me, mister. Please!"

everything to live for, a nice home, a nice wife, two kids, had met the blonde in a tavern one night. One thing had led to another until three days before he had walked out of his cage with a brief case full of steel engravings, some eighteen thousand dollars worth to be





My left forearm and fist are cork and steel. It was just like hitting him with a sledge.

# STAY AS DEAD AS YOU ARE!

*A Matt Mercer Crime Novel*

**By DAY KEENE**

exact. I had picked them up in Evanston that morning with most of the money still intact.

Haig looked at the blonde, then at Archer's wife. "The fool. The damn fool," was his comment.

I was hot. I was tired. I hadn't eaten since

noon. "Aren't we all," I said sourly. "I guess the moral is 'Don't steal peanuts.' If he had defaulted with two hundred thousand, the chances are he'd have gotten away with it easily."

Haig said that was debatable but admitted

that two hundred thousand dollars would buy a lot of lawyers.

"Yeah. Also a lot of cops," I added.

My crack was just that, a crack. But Haig took it personally. His face coloring slightly, he told me. "I resent that, Matt. It may be you have a price. Most private agency men have. But I'll be damned if I'd sell out for any amount of money."

Before I could stop him, he left the office. Only the blonde picked it up. "Yair. Guys who live in glass houses," she sneered. "I see now where we made our mistake. If Bill had swiped two hundred grand he could have bought a pass for a fifty-fifty split."

I took my receipt from Murphy and followed Haig into the hall but he was gone. I had hoped to straighten things out. I was to wish I had. It just shows what words can do. That little handful in Murphy's office damn near sent me to the chair.

It was still light but night was beginning to bracket the city when I walked out onto State Street. Olson of the Morals Squad was leaning on the building. "Nice night, eh, Matt?" he asked me. "This Indian Summer is the nuts."

I said it was, got into my car and drove to the office wondering if I had a price. I doubted it. I'm no little tin God. I've looked on the wine when it was red and done my share of wolfing and singing. *But honesty is good business.*

Mable was gone but she had listed two phone numbers and a message from Sherry on my pad—

'State 2131—Call Mr. Hanson of Amalgamated Underwriters no matter what time you get in. He says it is very important.

Drive 1132—A Miss Vardell phoned four times. She sounded angry or worried but refused to state her business. You can do as you like but I said that you would call her.

I dialed Jack Hanson's number as I read Sherry's message. Boiled down it said the Gleasons were coming for bridge, for God's sake to show up sober, and would I stop at a delicatessen on my way home and pick up a pound of sliced boiled ham, some Liederkrantz, and a loaf of bread.

Hanson's number didn't answer. I did better with Miss Vardell. She was both angry and worried. But her name wasn't Vardell. I recognized her voice the minute that I heard it. "I thought you were in Reno," I told her.

She said, "Shut up, you fool. I'm in another jam, a bad one." She gave an address on the Drive. "Come over right away."

I said, "Just like that, eh?", and hung up. I

had gotten her out of jams before. Most of them had worn trousers. And after the Archer affair, I was up to the thorax with cheaters. I wanted no part of Zola Charters. A tasty, red-haired, little dish, she was currently married to a Pittsburgh steel man whom, rumor had it, she was divorcing to marry Shad Ambler, a San Diego night club owner. Meanwhile it would seem that she was playing the field as usual.

SHE called back before I could get out of the office.

"Please, Matt, don't be mad at me," she begged. "This is a matter of life or death."

I said I had heard that one before.

"I mean it," she insisted. "I am supposed to be in Reno. Shad would kill me if he knew I was in Chicago." She began to sniffle. "And you have to get them back for me, you have to."

"I have to get what back?" I asked.

She seemed surprised. "Then you haven't talked to Jack Hanson?"

I said that I had not, that I had been out of the office all day. But that changed the color of the mare. In a lot of ways Hanson was another louse, but he threw me a lot of business. And if he was concerned in the affair, the chances were that someone had clipped Zola for her jewels. She never traveled without them and I knew that his firm insured them.

"Okay. I'll be right over," I told her.

The building was on the Drive, one of those affairs with a canopy out to the walk and a uniformed doorman to sneer at anyone who drives up in less than a Lincoln Continental. He put the burn on my six year old Ford then turned back to admire a '46 Caddy parked just beyond the canopy. I couldn't be certain but it looked like Hanson's car.

I walked over to check the license and the girl in the front seat turned her head away from me. It was Jack's car. I didn't know who she was.

"There was something you wanted?" the doorman asked.

I gave him a dirty look and walked on into the lobby. A second flunky stopped me at the elevator cage with a request for my name, who I was calling on, and if I was expected.

I said my name was Mercer, that I was calling on Miss Vardell in 7A, and that I was expected. He used the house phone to check me.

"What's the matter, you expecting a pinch?" I asked him.

He looked shocked but made no reply.

Zola answered the bell herself. She looked and smelled as pretty as usual. Tramp or not, she had what it takes, all in the proper places, and the white hostess gown she was wearing did little to conceal it.

"I've been a bad girl again, Matt," she greeted me.

I said, "So it would seem," and walked on into a sunken living room big enough to play football in. Hanson was sitting on an ottoman. Except for the fact that he was scowling at his drink, he could have passed for one of the silver-templed distinguished business men who appear in the whiskey ads. He wanted to know where the hell I'd been all day.

I told him, "Evanston. I tried to get you just before I called Zola. What gives?"

Zola began to cry. Hanson told me the story, salting it well with curses. He had reason to swear. His firm stood to lose a hundred and fifty grand. It was about what I had expected. Enroute from Pittsburgh to Reno to divorce her current husband in Shad Ambler's favor, she had stopped off in Chicago to kiss a boy goodbye.

She told me, between sniffles, "I just wanted to be certain that I didn't love him more than I love Shad. He's such a sweet boy, Matt."

I said to please skip the romantic details as I had a date to play bridge, also to locate some delicatessen items, including a loaf of bread. She gave me a dirty look.

Hanson continued the story. After a round of the hot spots, Zola and her boy friend, a Chicago lawyer by the name of Tennent, had returned to the apartment at four A.M. to find a masked hood waiting for them. The hood had known her jewels in detail and not content with the few she was wearing had forced her at gun point to phone the desk and ask the night manager to bring up her jewel case from the safe on the pretense she wanted to put the rings and necklace she was wearing into it.

Tennent had protested and the hood had knocked him out. When the night manager had brought the case, Zola, the gun still in her back, had taken it at the door, telling the night manager, as she had been instructed to tell him, that she might as well keep it in the suite as she intended checking out in the morning.

Hanson spread his hands in a futile gesture. "And—that's it. She called me at five this morning. I've been trying to make a contact ever since. But so far it's no dice."

Zola stopped sniffing and said coldly, "You may think you have me in a spot. I am." She pounded a little pink fist on the table. "But I want my jewels or the full amount they were insured for. And I mean to have one or the other if I have to tell Shad the whole story."

I asked Hanson if he had reported the theft.

"How could I?" he asked flatly. "She's not even supposed to be in town." He scowled at Zola over his glass. "But if I can't establish contact and make a deal with who ever pulled the job within the next twelve hours, I damn well will report it."

Zola sat down on his lap. "But you can't do

that to me," she back-watered. "Shad is so jealous he's green eyed. He'd kill me."

HANSON got up and gave her the ottoman, saying, "Fun is fun. But a hundred and fifty grand is one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. How about it, Matt? You want in on the case?"

I lit a cigarette and thought it over.

"Please, Matt," Zola begged. She stroked my coat sleeve. "Please."

I said it was my cork arm she was petting and besides she was wasting her time because if I took the case it would be for a financial and not a personal remuneration.

She took her hand away. "You're a nasty, evil minded, old man."

I admitted that could be.

Hanson made the usual offer. I had, and he knew I had, the underworld contacts that a private agency man must have to do business. How I recovered the jewels would be my own affair. But to save themselves the larger loss, if need be, Amalgamated was willing to pay one third of the appraised value of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It was the standard underwriter's offer. I had handled such deals for them before, but never in those brackets.

My fee would be the difference between that figure and whatever I had to pay out. It could mean quick money, and a lot of it. It could also mean a lot of grief. By becoming a party to such a deal, and bringing it to a successful conclusion, I technically laid myself wide open on three charges: receiving stolen goods, an accessory after the fact, helping to compound a felony.

A nice business this agency racket. "Okay. I'll take it," I agreed. I crossed my fingers. "But God help all three of us if anything goes sour."

It did. But that came some hours, and two dead men, later.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Quick Drink With a Kill.

THEY say everything comes to him who waits, including hardening of the arteries. I wouldn't know. I've always had to sweat for anything I wanted. And I was sweating now. I parked on 63rd Street a few doors west of Maxie's and looked at my watch in the dash light.

It was two minutes of eleven. Four of the twelve hours that Hanson had agreed to wait before he yelled 'Cop' were gone. The entrance of the boys in blue would complicate any deal I might try to make. And so far I'd learned nothing. Both of my ears were sore from tapping private wires but all I had heard to date was a lot of hard luck stories. If a local lad

had turned the trick, I hadn't plugged in on the right line or he wasn't boasting about it. I had sprinkled my bait behind me but the only two possible sources of information I had left were Maxie and young Tennent.

There is a combination bar and pool room in almost every town. There are a hundred in Chicago. But there is one Maxie's. Its clientele is strictly ex-State college. You can't jump an eight ball off a table without hitting an ex-con. All outsiders are discouraged.

There was the usual chatter at the bar. It froze as I walked in. I said, "Relax. This is strictly a social call."

To prove it, I bought a drink. Harry, a big, bald, ex-box man was back of the bar.

"Maxie in?" I asked him.

He mopped his bald spot with a bar towel. "So help me, Matt," he told me. "Here I am on the up and up for eight years now and I still break out in a sweat every time a cop walks in that door."

He was lying. I knew it. He knew I knew it. But it made for conversation. He peered back through the smoke at the pool tables. "Yeah, Maxie's here. He's playing snooker with Jack Stevens."

I paid for my drink and started back, stopped as I saw six loaves of bread on a shelf back of the free lunch counter.

Harry was concerned. "What's the matter? Don't the drink agree with you?"

I said the drink was fine but seeing the bread reminded me of a phone call I'd forgotten to make. I laid a dollar on the bar and asked him for a slug.

Sherry was too sweet. I could almost see the stiletto between her teeth as I explained I was sorry I had forgotten to call her but a big case had dropped in my lap and would she give my regrets to the Gleasons.

She said, "Why certainly, sweetheart. And where are you phoning from?"

I said, "Maxie's Bar," completely without thinking.

She said, "Oh, I see. You just dropped in for a loaf of bread, no doubt."

I tried to explain, but she'd hung up.

"Wife trouble?" Harry grinned.

I told him, dead pan, "No thanks. It would seem that I have some," and walked back to where Maxie was playing snooker.

A big man in his early forties, with cauliflower ears and a broken nose that he had picked up as a welterweight contender before he had discovered there was more money in being a fence, he was allergic to the law in any form.

"Yeah? And what do you want?" he growled.

I told him some conversation and walked on past the table into his private office in the rear. He followed me reluctantly and closed

the door behind him. "Okay. Converse," he said sourly.

I TOLD him not to be like that, that I hadn't come with a beef but was merely looking for some information and was willing to pay well for it.

"Information about what?" he wanted to know. "And how much is there in it for me?"

I said that would depend. There is fear among thieves, yes. But there isn't any honor. There wasn't a lad in the place that Maxie wouldn't sell, or who wouldn't sell him for that matter, if it was made worth his while. I took four fifties from my wallet and tossed them on his desk for bait.

"Who lifted the Charter's rocks, Maxie?"

He looked even more stupid than usual. "I wouldn't know," he told me. "I didn't even know they were gone. I don't read about it in the paper."

I said it wasn't in the papers as yet but that it would be in the morning. I added two more fifties. "That's yours for his name."

Maxie shook his head. "You could make it a thousand, Mercer, but I couldn't pick it up. This is the Charter bimb you mean, the red haired chickadee who used to strip at the Rialto before she married some guy from Pittsburgh?"

I said it was her jewels that had been stolen and gave him the story as Hanson had given it to me.

"And she can't describe the guy?"

"He was masked and kept his hat pulled down," I told him. "But Zola describes him as about five seven, weighing a hundred and fifty pounds, well dressed, and she thinks that he had brown eyes."

Maxie spread his hands. "Ten thousand guys you're describing. How much did he get?"

I said, "Amalgamated had them insured for one hundred and fifty thousand."

He whistled softly. "And they are willing to make a deal?"

I admitted, "If we can't recover them any other way."

He said, "Wait," and left the office.

I waited for half an hour, nursing a fifth of rye I found in his liquor cabinet and calling myself a damn fool for agreeing to take the case. *Honesty is good business*, and while what I was doing is done every day of the week I was skirting on the thin edge of bankruptcy.

Maxie came back with his shoulders sagging. "Pick up your money," he told me. "I guess that I don't earn it. I've called every lad I know who might have turned such a trick and all I get is beefs because someone beat them to what must have been an easy touch."

It was the same story that I had encountered

all night. I put my money in my wallet. "But you will keep your ear to the ground?"

"I'll keep it glued," Maxie assured me.

Out in the poolroom again I considered my best next move and decided to phone Tennent before I burst in on him unannounced. Zola had promised to phone him and say that I would drop in but in her present state of mind she wasn't to be depended on.

I did her an injustice. He was up and waiting for my call. "I am expecting you," he told me. "And I think I can do you some good. I've been thinking the whole thing over ever since it happened. And I think I know—"

He hesitated. "Yes—?"

"I would rather not discuss it over the phone," he changed his mind. "But I do want to see you. Incredible as it seems, I think I can clean up this whole affair. How soon can I expect you?"

I mentally checked his address. He lived on the near north side. "Within a half hour," I told him and hung up.

There was something about his voice I didn't like. It was too smug for one thing. On a hunch I bought another slug and called Hanson. "What can you tell me," I asked him, "about this lad Tennent who was with Zola when her gew gams were lifted?"

"Not much," Jack admitted. "He's a young lawyer with an office in the Loop. He has a fair practise, I believe."

I asked if it was fair enough to spend the kind of folding money a lad would have to spend to squire a girl like Zola.

He said, "Frankly, I wouldn't know. Why?"

Before I could tell him a woman's voice said, drunkenly, "Wash the idea of leaving me all alone, honey, to make a phone call at this time of night?"

Jack told her to shut up.

I said I hoped his face was red. I was burned. I had reason to be. His love life was no concern of mine but the Archer affair had turned me sour on extra-marital peccadillos. I knew that Hanson was married. I knew his wife was in Bermuda. And I didn't appreciate the fact that he was indulging his libido while I was beating my head against a wall trying to save his firm money.

"Why?" he repeated his question. "Why do you want to know Tennent's background?"

I told him because I wanted to know how much credence I could place in anything he might tell me, adding, "I'm on my way to see him now. And he just told me over the phone that, incredible as it seems, he thinks he can clean up the whole affair."

Hanson was excited. "You mean, he recognized the thief?"

I said that Tennent had intimidated as much.

"Good," Hanson said. "Good. Call me as soon as you've talked to him." He paused a

moment, added, "But about your fee, Matt." I asked, "What about it?"

HANSON started to crawl. "Well, naturally, I'm anxious to save the firm as much as I can. And don't you think that the difference between what you may have to pay to recover the jewels and—"

I told him, "No," and hung up.

Tennent lived on the first floor of an old brown stone front on Rush Street that had been remodeled into swank studio apartments. There was the usual grand piano draped with a black Spanish shawl and the usual couch heaped with pillows. The ceiling was high, and beamed. There was a fireplace. That was the living room. As far as I could tell, he had the whole first floor, a hallway running back to a bedroom and a kitchen. I didn't like his looks any better than I had liked his voice which was something.

He was a boy who had never outgrown his crew hair cut. You find them in the stag line of every deb's coming-out party. Their idea of a successful business career is to marry the boss' daughter and retire.

Not that he was a fool. He wasn't. He was a cold, shrewd baby. And he was looking out for number one. I wondered how he had ever gotten himself mixed up with a blow torch like Zola Charters. His first words answered that question. He had done some minor legal work for her in connection with the last theatrical contract she had signed.

"Now get this, and get this straight, Mercer," he made his position clear. "I don't feel that I owe Zola a thing. Understand?"

I didn't, but I said I did.

He fingered the bandage on his head. "In fact the blow I received might have killed me, it did almost fracture my skull."

It still was the Indian's summer. Heat flowed in through the open windows. I was hot. I was tired. I was hungry. I had laid out eighty bucks on the case so far without finding out a thing. Hanson, with the smell of a solution in sight, had tried to weasel on his agreement. I still had my peace to make with Sherry. "Look. I'm sorry you were slugged," I told him. "But let's cut out the preamble, son, and get down to facts. You told me over the phone that incredible as it might seem, you thought you could clear up the whole affair. All right. Let's have it."

His eyes turned shrewd. "Not so fast, Mercer. I know you. I know the fees that you charge. And before I do any talking I want to know what there is in this for me."

I asked why there should be anything in it for him.

"Because I'm almost positive," he told me, "that I can hand you the case on a platter. Tell me this. Has the company agreed to pay

a good sized percentage for the recovery of Zola's gems?"

I admitted they had.

"Now tell me this?" he grinned. "Did Zola describe the man to you?"

I said she had and repeated the description that she had given me.

His grin grew wider. "Nuts. He was at least six feet tall, weighed two hundred pounds, and his eyes weren't brown, they were blue. Despite the fact that his hat brim almost reached the handkerchief he was wearing over his nose as a mask, I saw his eyes distinctly as he slugged me."

I said, "So?"

He got out of his chair. "So think that over while I mix a couple of drinks. I may be wrong. But the way I see it, we have a bear by the tail."

He walked back down the hall toward the kitchen. I lighted a cigarette. He might have a bear by the tail. It turned out that he did.

I repeated his description. "Six feet, two hundred pounds, blue eyes." There was a wide divergence between his description and the one that Zola had given me, but it failed to ring any bell in my mind. Maxie had summed it up. Ten thousand lads could answer 'here' to the description, including myself, young Tennent, Maxie, and Jack Hanson.

Glasses rattled in the kitchen. I threw my cigarette in the fireplace and walked back down the hall. "Look. Nix on the guessing games. If you think you have something, spill it. If not—"

I left it there. So did young Tennent. The screen door stood open to the night, and the bear Tennent claimed to have by the tail had turned and clawed him. He wouldn't ever marry the boss's daughter. An unopened bottle of rye was slipping slowly from his fingers, he lay sprawled across the kitchen table, the wooden handle of a knife protruding from his back.

He tried to say something and couldn't. I slipped my gun from my holster, took a quick step toward the open door—then spiraled into space as a sap made contact with the base of my skull.

As my chin scraped the tile of the floor, I knew what Tennent had tried to say.

The killer was behind me. He had been waiting in one of the rooms that opened off the hall. The open screen was a booby trap.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Just a Love Nest

CONSCIOUSNESS was a pleasant surprise. I hadn't expected to come to. It didn't make sense that I had. Neither did the pool of water that I was lying in. Someone, for

some reason, had poured a pan of water on my head. But whoever it was, was gone. I was alone with Tennent.

I peeled my face from the tile and looked at him. One look was enough to see he was dead. The handle of the knife had moved. It was lower in his back, just under his left shoulder blade.

I entered the bathroom and washed the blood from my face. The sap had caught me on the base of my skull but the floor had gotten both eyes. They were beginning to swell and turn green across the cheek bones. It didn't improve my appearance.

There were two things I could do. I could wipe my fingerprints from anything that I might have touched or I could phone homicide. That would mean some embarrassing questions and the whole thing would come out. On the other hand I had my license to think of. Zola was nothing in my life. If her prospective husband beat the hell out of her—it might be a good idea.

Haig, I found, wasn't at Homicide, but I got him at his home. He wasn't too pleased to hear my voice. "You drunk, or what?" he wanted to know. "Calling me this hour of morning."

I said I guessed I was 'what' because I certainly wasn't drunk, but I was in a mess. Then I told him the whole story, omitting only the fact that Amalgamated, through Jack Hanson, had empowered me to pay up to fifty grand for the return of the jewels.

"And you're certain that Tennent is dead?"

I said I was positive.

"If you value your license, stay right where you are," he told me. "I'll contact the Department."

I said I would—but I didn't. Hanson lived only four or five blocks away. I wanted to talk to him to set our stories before they blew up in our faces. I didn't owe Zola a thing. But I did owe him something. And I didn't want to talk over the phone.

I parked in front of the building and went in. The lobby was sole deep in soapy water. At its far end, in front of a door that bore the legend—Janitor—the girl I had seen in Hanson's car was sniveling as a sullen-faced, older Latvian paused in his mopping from time to time to hurl a stream of invective at her.

"But I didn't. I wasn't, Pa," she protested. "Me and Mamie just went to a movie, honest. We went to the State and Lake."

He smelled her breath, said, "Bah! You bad girl. I know where you been. He married man. For shame. He don't leave you alone—I kill him."

He saw me then and shut up. Her mouth opened of its own volition, closed again as I walked on up the stairs. It was none of my affair but Hanson was playing with dynamite. I hoped he figured it was worth it.



He came to the door in a dressing gown, the silk stripe of his dress trousers gleaming dully in the half light. The eager smile faded from his face as he got a look at mine. "My God! What happened to you?"

I gave him the story, fast. A prowler car would be on its way to the dead lad's apartment by now. But being that he was home, it would take Inspector Haig fifteen or twenty minutes to get there. I wanted to be there when he did. He hadn't been kidding about my license.

"And that's the way it stacks up," I concluded. "It seems logical to assume the tech squad will find my fingerprints on that knife. No killer would pass up a chance like that. So, unless I wanted to face a murder rap, I had to spill the whole thing to Craig."

Hanson took the cigar from his mouth. "Including the fact that Amalgamated was willing to make a deal? We'll deny it."

I told him I had already figured that. I had.

He repeated thoughtfully, "Six feet, two hundred pounds, blue eyed. But why should Zola lie to us?"

I said I didn't think she had, not consciously. She had been excited. I pointed out a fact he knew as well as I did. No two witnesses ever agree on a description. But, he being a man, and a lawyer, I was inclined to believe that Tennent's had been the more accurate.

Hanson said, "Damn. If the young fool had only talked *before* he went out to the kitchen." He slipped out of his dressing gown and into a dinner jacket. "It looks like we're hooked for the whole sum now. Once this breaks in the papers whoever did the job will be afraid to try to make contact. It has passed from grand theft to murder."

I asked him if he thought he ought to call Zola.

He said, "To hell with her. If she wasn't such a little tramp we wouldn't be stuck for this loss. I hope to God Shad Ambler kills her. Of all the lousy breaks."

I said that it looked bad. It did. It was to get much worse.

**A**T HOMICIDE, once my eyes had been numbed by the light, it didn't bother me much. I'd been through sweat box sessions before, and this was strictly a fishing trip. Haig hadn't a thing on me. My prints *hadn't* been on the knife. The handle had been wiped clean.

"In other words," he said, "you don't know a thing about it? Your entire knowledge of the affair consists of the fact that you were engaged by this insurance firm to try and recover Miss Charter's jewels."

I said that summed it up.

Haig looked at his watch. "Jewels insured

for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars." He read from the list that Hanson had given him. "An eight carat square cut diamond ring, a ninety-eight stone diamond bracelet, a pair of four carat diamond earrings, a dinner ring containing ten two carat stones." He looked up from the list. "And so on. All, with the exception of the one eight carat stone, jewels that have no outstanding characteristics and could easily be fenced."

I said I didn't get what he was driving at.

He said, "You will." Dawn was painting the windows. He slipped his watch back in his pocket. "Now tell me this, Mercer. This theft took place some twenty-six hours ago. Why wasn't it reported?"

I said I believed that Zola had explained that. But either way, it was no skin off my nose. They were her jewels.

"Were," Haig agreed. He leaned heavily on the word. "Okay. So you didn't know about it until eight o'clock last evening. You do realize that you should have reported then?"

I told him that was a moot question, that the very nature of my work was confidential and that I was more or less bound by the wishes of my client. He was building up to something. Just what I was damned if I knew.

He grew suddenly palsy walsy. "Look, Matt. I've known you for some years now. You have an excellent record both as a former sergeant of Marines and as a private agency man. You've given an arm for your country. You've helped the Department on various occasions and at the same time built up a lucrative practice for yourself. And don't think for a moment that all that won't be taken into consideration at your trial. So you were tempted. You fell. Why not come clean and get it over with, Matt?"

I said I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. I didn't.

Haig stopped being palsy walsy. His eyes turned into gimlets as he bellowed, "The hell you don't. I'm talking about your price. You went on record last evening when you brought in that lad Archer." He threw my own words at me. "The moral is don't steal peanuts. If he had defaulted with two hundred thousand dollars, the chances are that he would have gotten away with it. Well, you aren't going to, Mercer. You killed young Tennent for those jewels. And you're going to the chair."

I asked if he wanted to bet. But I wasn't as confident as I sounded. My mouth was dry. Funnier things had happened. I added, "You're off on the wrong foot, Haig. I didn't kill Tennent. Remember? I'm the lad who phoned you and told you he was dead!"

Haig sneered, "Strictly as a cover. But it isn't going to work." He picked up a Depart-

ment report and read off the names of most of the lads I'd talked to concerning the theft, including Maxie's. You offered them all big money. Why? I'll tell you. Because you scented a clean-up! You wanted those diamonds. And somewhere along the line, you learned it was an inside job—that Tennent, had hired a stooge to slug him and stage the robbery. So you called on Tennent, demanded a split of the loot—then stabbed him to shut his mouth."

I said, "For a handful of diamonds."

Haig thrust his face into mine. "For one hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth, all of it easily fenced."

I had taken all that I could. There was a plainclothes man on both sides of me but before they could stop me I hit Haig so hard he bounced off Sergeant Zukor. "You're a dirty, stinking, liar," I called him. "I never stole a dime in my life. And when I have any killing to do, I do it with a gun."

I tried to hit him again. I did my best. But he scrambled out of my way and Zukor and the plainclothes men beat and wrestled me back into the chair. Haig got up feeling his jaw and looking me over thoughtfully. He didn't seem sore about the blow. I reasoned later that he knew he had it coming. Like I said before, he hadn't a thing on me. It was strictly a fishing trip. Still frothing, I insisted, "All right. Let's get this over with. If one wise crack can sour an honorable discharge and forty years of honest living, let's go over and see the D.A. Have the grand jury indict me and let's let a jury decide this."

"Cool off," Haig advised me. "It could be that we're wrong. But you did leave the apartment after I told you to stay put."

I began to see what was gnawing on him. Either he, or one of the bright boys on his squad, had reasoned that if Tennent had engineered the theft, and if I *had* killed him for the jewels, my logical move would be to stash the gems before Homicide arrived. I told the truth, "Yes. I did leave the apartment. I drove over to see Hanson and tell him what had happened."

Zukor wanted to know why.

**S**TILL sore, I needed, "Because you lads being as dumb as you are, I thought I might need a lawyer. And it looks as if I was right."

A plainclothes man came in to the squad room and said something to Haig. He sighed and turned out the light. "Being human, we make mistakes," he admitted. "That's all for now, Mercer. But we know where to find you if we want you."

I put on my coat and walked out of the squad room. Hanson was waiting in Haig's office with one of the company's lawyers. Her face

white under her make-up, Zola was sitting in a chair against the wall. There were the usual reporters beating their gums and wanting to know all about it.

One of them whooped when he saw my face. "Holy smoke! Did Haig do that to you, Mercer?"

I told the truth. "No. No one laid a hand on me." I looked at Zukor. "Except in self defense."

Hanson said he was sorry that it had taken them so long but it had been difficult to find a judge to sign the writ. The lawyer offered it to Inspector Haig.

Haig shook his head. "That won't be necessary." He drummed his fingers on the statement I had made concerning my conversation with Tennent and Hanson and asked me if I was willing to sign it.

I said I was, and did.

While I was signing it, he asked Zola if she thought it was possible that young Tennent had engineered the theft. She said that she did not, but admitted that his description of the thug might be more accurate than hers as she had been in a state of mind bordering on hysteria at the time. "I'm still hysterical," she sniveled. "I don't see why all this has to get in the papers. Can't you understand? I'm not even supposed to be in Chicago. I'm a respectable married woman on my way to Reno to be divorced."

Hanson sighed, and spread his hands. The reporters whooped. Haig blew on my signature to dry it, read from the statement, "Six feet, two hundred pounds, blue eyed. 'Who knew you were calling on Tennent, Mercer?'"

"No one," I told him. "That is, no one but Jack here."

"That's what I mean," Haig said quietly. He looked at Hanson. "You couldn't be mixed up in this, could you, Jack?"

"I'm involved, yes. Deeply," Hanson said. "I wrote the policy. And I'm responsible to the directors for the loss, that is, if the jewels aren't recovered."

The air in the office grew suddenly dead and still. "That," Haig said soberly, "isn't quite what I meant, Jack. Whoever lifted those jewels knew that Zola had them, knew her habits." He tapped my statement. "According to this, Tennent recognized, or thought he recognized, the man who slugged him. And the man whom he described fits your description to a T."

His lips white with anger, Hanson said, "You're mad."

Haig continued, unruffled, "More, it would seem that you, alone, knew that Mercer was calling on Tennent."

Hanson repeated, "You're mad."

"Out of your mind," Zola laughed nervously and shrilly. "I wasn't that hysterical."

And I've known Jack Hanson for years." "Men," Haig continued dryly, "even high salaried men, get into jams sometimes." He looked pointedly at the company lawyer. "Understand, I'm making no accusations. But I have a murder on my hands. And I'm certain that under the circumstances, Mr. Hanson won't mind telling us where he was on the night of the theft."

His face scarlet, Hanson walked the company lawyer, a lad by the name of Bedell over to a corner of the office and talked earnestly with him for a moment. Then, his face still red, he told Haig, "I consider your veiled accusation and question as to my whereabouts

most impertinent. But due to the size of the loss, and in order not to impede the investigation, on the night that Zola's jewels were stolen I was in the company of a young woman by the name of Betty Janawosky. And while the matter may prove embarrassing to her, I am certain she will so testify."

Haig persisted. "And last night, when Tennent was killed?"

Hanson took a deep breath, exhaled. "My alibi, if one is needed, is the same. I was with Betty Janawosky." He looked at me. "I believe she broke in on our conversation when you phoned me concerning Tennent. Do you remember?"

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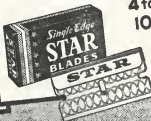
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# STAR BLADES

I admitted hearing a girl's voice in his apartment.

Inspector Haig asked how to spell Janawosky and wrote the name on his scratch pad. "And her address?"

Hanson's voice was scarcely audible. "Her address is the same as mine. Her father is the janitor of our building."

I have no use for cheaters. But I felt sorry for Hanson. I knew how the papers would handle the story—

PROMINENT INSURANCE EXECUTIVE ADMITS MAINTAINING LOVE NEST FOR JANITOR'S DAUGHTER WHILE WIFE IS IN BERMUDA!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Fiery Furnace

SCHOOL was out. That meant it was after three and I'd had six hours sleep. I lay with my eyes closed listening to the twins. They were hungry as usual and demanding that Magnolia put both peanut butter and jelly on their bread and could they have a peanut and jelly bread for Johnny.

Someone ran water in the bathroom. I tried to open my eyes, and couldn't. They felt fine but something was weighting them down. I peeled off two pieces of cotton. It was small wonder my eyes felt better. Sherry had kept cold glycerine pads on them. She was dipping fresh ones in the solution now.

I called that I was awake and she came in and sat on the edge of the bed. "Did I ever tell you I love you?" I asked her.

She wrinkled her nose at me. "Quite frequently." Her lips were cool and sweet. "Poor papa bird. Here mama thought he was on a bing and he was getting his face pushed in fighting for a worm."

She put a cigarette in my lips and lighted it. I had explained the whole thing to her before I'd gone to bed. I'd had to square myself. "Anything new?" I asked.

She wrinkled her nose. "All very disgusting. According to the noon newscast it would seem that Betty Janawosky's father attempted to kill Jack Hanson. He did black one of his eyes and Hanson had him put under a peace bond. Also your boy friend Maxie has called at least six times and wants you to call him as soon as you wake up."

I chewed over the information. The scandal would probably cost Hanson his job. He had it coming. But I was out eighty bucks on the case so far and I meant to get it back from someone. I asked if Zola's name had been mentioned in the newscast.

Sherry said it had. Her anatomy, as revealed in an old picture from her stripping

days, had also been prominently revealed in all the morning papers. "She's raising hell," Sherry told me. "She wants either the jewels or the money."

No mention had been made of either husband, present or prospective, but young Tennent had come in for a good play. One of the papers had even advanced the theory of a possible jealousy motive for his slaying. For reasons of his own Haig had absolved me completely.

I took the phone on the night table, called the Amalgamated office, and asked for Hanson. Someone who said his name was Schaeffer answered the phone. I recognized the name. I'd seen it on checks. He was the big shot from the New York office.

He thawed when he heard my name but played it cagey when I asked if the deal was still on since I thought that I had a nibble.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about," he told me. "But the company is, of course, eager to minimize their loss and we will be glad to reimburse you for any sum you may have to pay out for 'information' that will lead to the recovery of Miss Charter's jewels."

I said to hell with that, that I wasn't laying out another dime but that if the company wanted me to I would investigate the nibble at double my standard per diem fee and phone him again when I had.

He agreed but he was still spluttering when I hung up.

The lad was waiting in Maxie's office. He said his name was Frazer and, according to Maxie, he had walked in cold, said he had read in the morning papers that I was handling the Charter case for Amalgamated and had offered Maxie half a C to arrange a meeting in his office.

He was another rah-rah boy, well dressed, six feet, blue-eyed, and would weigh in around two hundred pounds.

I thought I had it then. Haig's theory was right. Tennent had been in on the deal. It had been a fraternity affair, all for dear old Tappa Nu Keg, and the financial advantage of the two parties involved. But Tennent had gotten cold feet, tried to double cross Frazer, and had gotten a knife in the back instead.

I said casually, "I carry a gun." Frazer smiled, white-toothed. "How original. I'm sorry that I can't say the same." He looked at Maxie. "Scram. Our agreement was that I talked to Mercer alone."

I nodded to Maxie and he left the office. "Now," Frazer began, "don't get me wrong. I'm strictly a middle man. But you *are* interested in recovering the Charter jewels?"

I said that would depend. It did. Grand larceny was one thing. Murder was another. Still, I didn't know that he had killed Tennent and if I put the sleeve on him and it turned

out that he hadn't, I was kissing good-by to the difference between what he was willing to take and what Amalgamated would pay for the return of Zola's stones.

He read my mind. "I wouldn't. Believe me. I'm strictly a middle man."

I salved my conscience with the thought that having seen him, I could identify and pick him up if it turned out he had killed Tennent. "What's your proposition?" I asked.

"My principle," he told me, "will take fifty thousand dollars, the exchange to be made as he directs, and no questions to be asked."

I said he was out of his mind.

He read me a list of the jewels to prove he had them. "How about forty-five thousand?" he hedged.

I TRIED to beat him down to forty, settled for forty five and agreed to meet him, if Amalgamated okayed the deal, at the Soldiers' and Sailors' monument in Westwood Cemetery at ten o'clock that night. Either he, or the lad behind him, if there was one, was bright. Westwood was out of the City limits, and out of Haig's jurisdiction. The monument, as I recalled it, stood alone on a rounded knoll. A stake-out would be difficult. There were a half dozen more details. I was to come alone. On reaching the monument, I was to light a match to show I had the money. The money was to be packed in a brief case, two thousand fives, two thousand tens, and seven hundred and fifty twenties. I would be permitted to check the jewels while the contact man counted the money.

I did some mental arithmetic. The whole setup was screwy as hell. Someone was doing something to someone. I didn't intend it would be me. "Okay," I agreed. "It's a deal. That is, if the Underwriters okay it. Leave Maxie a number to call. I'll let him know in half an hour."

Schaeffer, Hanson, and two directors of the firm whom I had never met before, were holding a conference in Hanson's office. He looked like a sick dog. From what I gathered they had been riding him plenty. He was out on a long, long limb and they were ready to saw it off.

I told them the deal I had made and Schaeffer hit the ceiling. He was damned if he'd do business with a thief, he'd rather pay the full loss, besides if I was as good as Hanson claimed I was, I would have beaten down the price "to say, possibly at least twenty-five thousand."

I said they could take it, or leave it.

While they tossed the money bag around, Hanson walked me out into the hall. One eye was swollen almost shut. He looked like he was about to burst into tears. "They're firing me, Matt," he told me. "Fifteen years with

the firm and because I get my name in the papers, I get the boot."

I said that was too bad.

He swore. "All over a dirty little tramp like Zola. If she hadn't stopped off in Chicago to see Tennent, no one would ever have found out about Betty."

Remembering the scene I had witnessed in his lobby, I asked how her father had treated the girl.

"He threatened to kill us both," Hanson told me. "He did try to kill me. I am afraid that he may yet. Putting him under a peace bond hasn't meant a thing. He has been roaring drunk ever since the papers hit the street." He scowled at his cigar. "To keep him from harming Betty I had to ask Zola to take her in until Janawosky cools off."

It was his mess. I let him stew. "About the deal," I began. "Do you think—?"

"To hell with the deal," he cut me short.

"I did my best. I hope the tight-fisted chisellers have to pay off the whole loss."

But they didn't feel that way about it. Schaeffer called me back into the office. It was alum in his mouth but he told me that if the deal was the best they could make, they would have to accept it. He scowled at Hanson. "I suppose the firm still has fifty thousand in its Chicago account?"

Hanson mumbled something about his getting into a scandal over a girl didn't mean he was also a thief and Schaeffer could take his job. So saying he stalked out of the office.

If it was big business, I didn't want any part of it. I felt like I hadn't bathed for a week. My five grand cut didn't seem so large. Besides, if I had figured the score correctly, the lad in back of the steal didn't mean for me to get it. I had been played for a sucker.

But two can play at that game. They say confession is good for the soul. And mine should have felt pretty good. Enroute from Maxie's to the office I had stopped in at H.Q. and had a heart to heart talk with Haig. . . .

A cold wind had arrived with night fall. Indian Summer was over. At nine it began to rain. Black storm clouds obscured the stars. There was no moon. The only sounds were the chirp of the crickets, the hoarse booming of the frogs and the distant whistling of a freight train far down the C.M.&S.P. tracks. It was a peach of a spot and night for murder.

I sat parked half a block from the cemetery gate, waiting for ten o'clock. The forty-five thousand dollars I had agreed to exchange for Zola's jewels was in the brief case on the seat beside me.

Not that I was making five thousand on the deal. I wasn't. All I was getting was lumps. But I at least was saving my license and squaring myself with Haig.

It was Hanson, of course. It had been

Hanson from the start. Haig's wild crack in his office hadn't been as funny as it sounded. I had realized that at Maxie's when Hanson's stooge, Frazer, had named fifty thousand dollars as his original asking price. No one but Hanson and Zola and myself had known the figure he had agreed to pay. A little thing, but sufficient. I mulled him over as I waited.

A high flier and a chaser, Hanson was always in need of money. He had probably been harder pushed than usual and Zola's stop-over had been a God send. He knew her jewels. He knew she never traveled without them. He knew his firm, having insured them for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars would be willing to pay a third of that to save the larger fee. It had looked like a quick fifty thousand with little or no risk. Punks like Frazer come cheap. He had hired him to turn the trick, then called me in as a go between. He knew, that with a wife and two kids to keep in nylons and jelly bread, I would jump at the chance to earn a good sized fee.

I had. Then things had begun to go wrong. As I saw it, Tennent had recognized Frazer and figured out the rest. His asking if the firm was willing to pay a good sized percentage for the recovery of the jewels was seemingly evidence of that. I, like a fool, had blabbed the potential solution to Hanson. He had sent his girl friend down stairs, too high to know what time it was, and willing to alibi him because the little fool thought he loved her. Then he had driven to Tennent's apartment and knifed him to close his mouth. There was no need to kill me. He wanted me alive. In fact, before he left, he had thrown water on me to make certain I came to. I was another link in his alibi.

The minute hand came to attention. I got out of the car, slamming the door loudly behind me and scuffed across the gravel through the gate. Frazer had made one bad mistake in outlining the pay-off. Along with knowing the exact sum Amalgamated was willing to pay, the mistake had been what had tipped me. I was to examine the jewels while the contact man counted the money. He would have to work by either match or torch light. And figuring he counted four bills to a second, it would still take him better than a quarter of an hour. And no lad with both a grand larceny and murder charge against him was going to hang around with a detective that long—not even in a cemetery.

I expected to see the jewels. Then as I saw the play, whoever met me, would slug me. When I came to Hanson would have both the money and Zola's jewels. I'd have a sour taste in my mouth and a stink on my reputation that I would never live down.

I transferred my gun from my holster to my pocket as I walked through the gate and down

the road toward the monument. There was a dim light in the gate house, also a squad of Chicago cops. More, were scattered around behind tombstones, squatted in the rain.

Haig had liked my story well enough to pull a lot of wires. But he had also warned me what would happen if anything went sour. I knew how he was reasoning. He figured I had a finger in the pie and was selling Hanson down the river to save my own hide.

Most of the leaves were off the trees and the bare limbs scraping together in the rising wind sounded like whimpering voices. Knowing I'll have one some day, I've never been fond of tombstones. Rain ran off the brim of my hat and down the turned up collar of my rain coat. My feet were soaked before I'd gone a block.

The monument stood on a rise. I climbed the hill and lit a match, cupping it in my hands against the rain. Then I dropped my hand back in my pocket and waited.

The once distant train whistle came nearer, shrieked for the Westwood crossing, then thundered by a block away on the south side of the cemetery. When it had passed, the croaking of the frogs seemed louder.

I put the case between my knees and lighted another match. Still nothing happened. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, then twenty.

Then a shadow wove through the tombstones, a deeper blob of black against the night, reached the foot of the hill and began to climb. I slipped the safety off my gun. But it wasn't either Hanson or Frazer. It was Haig.

Rain glistened on his cheeks. His face contorted with anger, he demanded, "Just what the hell are you trying to pull, Mercer?"

I was mad as he was. "What the hell do you mean, what am I trying to pull?" Other figures began to pop up behind the tombstones. "I give you the case on a platter. And now you've ruined the stake-out. With you shooting off your face so they can hear you in Evanston, how do you expect Hanson or Frazer to show?"

He said, "I don't. I don't believe there is a Frazer. I believe that you invented him, just like you invented the rest of your cock and bull story about it being Hanson who killed Tennent. You just saw a good horse, and you rode it. You killed Tennent for those jewels—and you're going to the chair!"

Something had gone very sour. My mouth suddenly dry, I asked him, "And just how do you figure that out?"

"It's elemental," he told me. "Old man Janowosky just proved Hanson's alibi."

"Just proved Hanson's alibi?" I was really puzzled.

"Yes," Haig said coldly. "Because of the way that Hanson had treated his daughter he just beat Hanson to death in his own apart-



ment, then carried him downstairs and stuffed him into the furnace!"

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I was sick. Hanson had been a heel, but it was a hell of a way to die.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Sound Shooting

HANSON'S living room looked like the Bears and the Green Bay Packers had played a night game in it. Lamps had been hurled every which way. Chairs were overturned, end tables and mirrors smashed. There were a dozen deep gouges in the plaster on the north wall. It was also well splattered with blood. The first homicide man to arrive had found the murder weapon pushed under a couch, a heavy, iron furnace shaker.

I toured the apartment with Sergeant Zukor. I had no choice. Haig had ordered me handcuffed to him. "I don't suppose," I asked him in Hanson's bedroom, "that it would do any good to tell you that I didn't kill young Tennent and know nothing about the jewels."

He shrugged. "Me, I'm just a cop. I do like I am told."

We went back to the living room. Two of the other boys brought Janawosky in from where ever they had been holding him. He was somewhat sobered now, and frightened. He admitted to anyone who would listen that he remembered fighting with Hanson and insisted the fight had taken place in his basement apartment. "But I no kill him. I too drunk. I just beat him op a bit."

Haig ignored him to talk to Assistant Coroner Vogel who had made the examination of what few charred remains they had been able to sift from the ashes.

There hadn't been much left to examine. Identification had been made by one of Hanson's dentures that had dropped through the grates into the fire pit, a large scarab ring he habitually wore, a twisted cigarette case and

lighter, what was left of his watch, and by the size and shape of the remains.

Still pale and sweating, Vogel swore, "Another case like this and I resign."

It didn't bother Haig. "You were able to estimate the time of death?"

Vogel shook his head. "Hell no. This time you can me."

The district hack who had investigated the complaint said he thought it must have been shortly after ten. He thought so because the call had come into the Sheffield Station at 10:10. He had arrived at 10:29 to investigate a 'fight'. All was quiet in Hanson's apartment but the door being open he walked in, discovered its condition, and knowing of the bad blood between Hanson and Janawosky had immediately phoned Homicide.

It had been the excessive heat in the radiators that had tipped them, that and the fact they had found Janawosky lying on the floor of the laundry in a drunken stupor, his shirt and pants speckled with blood, and still clutching a coal scoop in one hand.

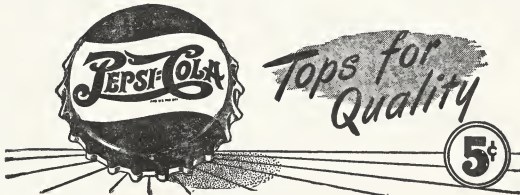
Haig glowered at me. "And where was I? I was out squatting in the rain waiting for a mythical contact man to arrive. You tripped yourself this time, Mercer. You put on a good act, but it failed."

I said that Frazer wasn't mythical. "You can check with Maxie on that."

He snorted, "Maxie!"

Even Vogel chuckled. Maxie's word wasn't worth a dime. And unless I could prove that Frazer did exist and had contacted me, I was out on a long long limb with twelve of my peers, a judge, and the D. A. about to saw it off. The State would contend, and successfully, that my trip out to Westwood with a brief case full of insurance money was merely an act to cover the fact that I, myself, had the jewels, having killed Tennent to get them.

There was a bustle at the door as two H.Q. men came in with Zola and Betty, and followed by Schaeffer of Amalgamated. Despite the jam I was in, I felt sorry for the Janawosky



kid. She didn't look cheap now. Hanson had turned her head but she had real stuff in her. Her eyes puffed and swollen with crying, she went directly to her father, put her arms around him and kissed him.

"It's all my fault, Pa," she sobbed. "If I hadn't been such a fool, none of this would have happened."

He patted her awkwardly. "I no kill him, Betty. All I do is fight him, then got drunk on bottle of whiskey he bring down to the basement for try to make friends with me."

A time bomb started ticking in my mind. But no one else seemed to see anything strange in Janawosky's remark. Zola was to blame for that. Looking like a million dollars, and twice as hard to get, she was telling Schaeffer that while she was broken hearted over Jack Hanson's death, he being an old and a dear friend of hers, she felt the insurance company had stalled her long enough, and she wanted either her jewels or the money.

Schaeffer looked at me, saw the cuff on my wrist and gasped. "Mercer's your boy," Haig told him. "As we see it he got Zola's diamonds. He killed young Tennent to get them."

I asked Zola if she believed that.

Her eyes were cold. "I don't know what to believe," she said, "or whom to trust." She pounded on one of the broken end tables with a greedy little pink fist. "All I know is that I want my jewels or the insurance and if I don't get it I'm going to a lawyer."

**I**T HAD all been so simple all the time. It had been right in front of my nose. And I'd been too dumb to see it. But there was no use telling Haig. His mind was made up. I was guilty.

Schaeffer mopped at his cheeks with a sodden handkerchief. "You'll get your money," he assured Zola. He tapped his pocket. "I have a certified check for the loss made out and if you will accompany me back to the office to sign a release and a waiver on the jewels we'll conclude your part in this unfortunate affair."

Haig asked what he was sweating for.

"You'd sweat, too," Schaeffer said hotly, "if you had just heard the auditor's report. Hanson has been stealing us blind for years. God knows how much he's stolen. Only a thorough audit will uncover that. And if his amatory sins hadn't caught up with him so fortunately, I would be down at Headquarters this moment swearing out a grand larceny warrant."

Haig merely shrugged. "It costs dough to live like he did." He thumped the brief case full of pay-off money and scowled at me. "How about it, wise guy? Do you still think a man can get away with it if he steals enough?"

I'd had a sufficiency of Haig. "If you were

in charge of the case, he could," I needed.

His face red, he told Zukor, "Take him down to H.Q. Throw him in a cell but don't book him. He doesn't get to see a lawyer until we have a confession."

Zukor rattled the cuffs. "You heard the Inspector. Let's go."

I was glad to. I wanted alone with Zukor—bad. There was a reason. I hadn't a thing to lose. I was sitting on a toboggan with the seat of my pants scorching. And when they had searched me out at the dead man's park, Zukor had used my own cuffs on me. He had also taken my keys. But he had overlooked the spare key in my pants watch pocket.

Zola touched my arm as we passed. "Just tell me this much, Matt. It was Bill Tennent who hired some thug to steal my jewels? Who got them?"

I said, "You were there. You should know."

She shrugged and turned away. Zukor walked me out of the room and into the elevator. Once we were in a squad car, I wouldn't have a chance. It was now or never. My left forearm and fist are cork and steel. It was like hitting him with a sledge. Zukor's eyes turned glassy, his knees sagged under his weight.

A colored girl was running the cage. I had Zukor's gun in my hand when she turned around. Her eyes mostly whites, she begged, "Don't shoot me, Mister. Please."

I told her to stop the cage. She did. Then I unlocked the cuff from my wrist, let Zukor slump to the floor and told the girl to run me down to two. When she let me out, I told her, "Now take the cage to the roof—and keep it there."

She wasn't as frightened as I thought. The hand on the dial over the door shot up but stopped at Hanson's floor. Cursing, I raced down the fire stairs to the basement.

Two fingerprint men were still going over Janawosky's apartment. They paid no attention to me as I ran by the door. But the uniformed cop in the boiler room had plenty between his ears. He saw a citation and plain clothes the moment he spotted me.

"Hold it, Mercer!" he ordered. He slipped his gun from his holster. "Hold it or I'll shoot."

He did. But he fired his first shot over my head. And that was a bull on his part. I gave him what I'd given Zukor. He rolled with the punch and went down groggy but still conscious, feeling for his gun, and shouting, "Stop him! Haig's prisoner's got away."

I threw a slug back into the basement to discourage the fingerprint men and fought the bolt on the boiler room door. It was rusted and by the time I got it open, the cop on the floor had found his gun. He rolled over on his belly and squeezed off a burst of three.

I could have shot him. I didn't. I had nothing against the lad. He was just working for wages. He was a good cop but a lousy shot. Lead thudded into the door jamb, sending a shower of splinters into the right side of my face.

The fingerprint men refused to be discouraged. All three cops were shooting at me as I ran up the stairs to the alley. But the night being as black as it was, all three were shooting at sound.

I caromed off a garbage can and three slugs smacked into it, one of them burning my ribs. Windows were opening now. I heard a woman scream—"Here he is!"

Then a car turned into the alley, its headlights pinning me against a garage. I dived into an areaway, tripped over a child's toy wagon, got to my feet and ran on, panting.

My side hurt, but not badly. My face hurt worse. I felt like an inverted porcupine. I crossed the next street and the next, sticking to areaways and finally came out on State. A few doors from the corner of Rush, in front of an all night bar, a Yellow Cab driver was dozing at his wheel. I slipped into the cab and slammed the door. "Let's go."

He woke up with a start and slid back the glass partition. "I'm sorry, Bud," he told me. "You better flag another cab. I'm waiting for a fare."

The sirens were wailing now. Men were piling into prowl and squad cars with orders to shoot me on sight. In five minutes a snake wouldn't be able to crawl through the cordon that would be thrown around the district.

I let the driver look into the barrel of Zukor's gun. "Well, what are you complaining about?" I asked him. "Kick it over and get rolling. So you're waiting for a fare. You have one."

He got my point—and rolled.

## CHAPTER SIX

### What's Your Price?

THE bar was small, and Irish, well back of the Yards. I had changed cabs three times to get there. No one paid any attention to my face. It was that kind of a joint. There were two or three drunks who looked as bad as I did.

I bought a double rye and ten dollars worth of quarters and halves to play the phone booth in the corner. Haig had taken the five grand fee and added it to the dough in the brief case to be returned to Schaeffer but he had left me my own wallet to be checked in at the Bureau. "And I may need more," I told the barkeep. "I'm calling my girl in San Diego."

He grinned, "You got it bad. Me, I never mess around with dames."

It was a typical big-shot run-a-round. Being that time of night I got Shad Ambler's Club Dreamland for four bucks but had to donate three more talking to minor punks before he came on the wire. I played my cards as I saw them. I told him who I was, that I was in a jam, and I thought he could help me.

He wanted to know why he should.

I mentioned several lads we both knew and he thawed considerably. "Go ahead. Shoot. Maybe I'll need a favor some day."

I said I had read in the papers that he was going to marry Zola Charters as soon as she divorced her current husband and wanted to know if it was the McCoy.

He swore, "Hell no. I read that story, too. But there isn't a thing to it. I don't know where my name came in. And as I get it from the grapevine, she isn't divorcing her husband. He is divorcing her and naming some Chicago man."

I had thought I was right. I was. The perfect murder had gone sour. "Thanks a million," I told Ambler.

He seemed puzzled. "That all you wanted?"

"It is enough," I told him.

I hung up, thought it over, then made another phone call, a nickel one this time.

Zola wasn't pleased to see me. She opened her mouth to scream, thought better of it, said, "Well, don't stand there in the hall like a fool. Come in. But you shouldn't have come here, Matt. Don't you know that every cop in Chicago is looking for you."

I said I did, what was more I had scars to prove it. I walked on into the living room, sat down and poured myself a drink.

She hesitated near the phone. "I really should call the police."

"Why don't you?"

"What do you want from me, money to get out of town?"

I admitted it was an idea and asked how she had made out with Amalgamated.

Her grin was gamin. "I have their check."

I added, "Also the jewels. It was a good try, Zola, but it missed. You see I've just been talking to Shad. And he not only tells me that he has no intention of marrying you but that it's your husband who's getting the divorce, naming a Chicago man."

She thought fast, admitted, "Yes. That's so. I just gave the papers Shad's name to protect Bill Tennent." She forced tears to her eyes. "But I don't understand what you mean about the jewels. A masked man put a gun—"

She stopped short as the door bell rang.

"That should be Schaeffer," I told her.

"Seeing as I was hired by Amalgamated to recover them, I phoned him before I came over and told him where they were."

She gasped, "You're mad. You're out of

your mind, Matt Mercer." Her eyes grew shrewd. "And who else did you call?"

I told the truth. "No one."

Her night gown swishing about her ankles, she swept to the door and opened it. "Come in, Mr. Schaeffer." She fairly pulled him into the apartment. "I never was so glad to see anyone in my life." She locked the door behind him. "Matt Mercer is here—and he's mad."

Schaeffer looked old and grey. I offered him a drink. "Cheer up. The worst is yet to come. Wait until the dead begin to walk."

"A wise guy, eh?" a familiar voice said behind me.

I didn't bother to turn. I knew who it was.

Schaeffer's face turned three shades greyer. "Hanson!" he gasped. "But it can't be. You're dead!"

**I** CORRECTED him, "No. It's Frazer his stooge who is dead. After picking a fight with Janawosky and leaving him a fifth of drugged whiskey, Jack killed Frazer in his apartment, dressed him in a suit of his clothes, put his watch and lighter and case into one of the pockets and stuffed him into the furnace along with a spare denture that he tossed directly into the ash pit to make certain the charred remains were identified as his."

Hanson, fully dressed, came into the room, a snub nosed automatic in one hand. "I should have killed you last night at Tennent's," he admitted. "It would have saved me the job now."

"What put you wise?" he asked me.

I said it was surprising the thoughts even a dumb agency man could think when his own hide was in danger, but admitted, "You had even me fooled when the stake-out in Westwood folded due to the news of your demise. It was a crack of Janawosky's, a crack Haig somehow overlooked, that put me back on the track. You don't put a man under a peace bond then try to buy his friendship with a fifth of whiskey. And I was positive you'd pulled a fast one when Schaeffer told us your accounts were short. You've been planning this for some time. Making love to Betty was a business proposition with you. After you made your steal, you had to disappear. And what better way than to be killed by the father of a girl you'd wronged."

Schaeffer gasped, "He stole the jewels himself. He and Zola connived."

"That's right," I nodded. "Now they have both the jewels and the insurance check. They never intended to try for the fifty thousand. That was just dust in our eyes."

Zola cursed me as only a burlesque queen can curse. "We'll spend it, sucker. We'll go to South America just like we planned. And we'll have plenty for the rest of our lives."

Knowledge of sin came slowly to Schaeffer. "They're in love."

"At least what passes for love in certain circles," I said dryly. I was beginning to sweat. The affair wasn't going to suit me. There should be loud rappings on the door by now. Knowing Haig as I did, I had been positive that one of the first things he would do would be to put a police operator on the switchboard of Schaeffer's hotel in the hope I would contact him, offering to trade Zola's jewels for getaway money.

Hanson thumbed the safety on and off his gun. He seemed to be trying to make up his mind. "Believe me, Matt," he said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen."

I said, "Why let it?"

He shrugged. "I have no choice."

"I don't suppose that I can call Sherry?"

Zola shrieked, "And have the call traced to here. What do you think we are, fools?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "I do. Haig is right in that respect. No matter how much a man steals, it catches up with him sooner or later."

"The hell you say," Hanson sneered. "Turn up that radio, Zola. Here's the story." He outlined it quickly.

After he shot me and Schaeffer, he'd beat it down the back way and take a train directly to New Orleans, their jumping off point for S.A. He was a bright boy, make no mistake. The story she was to tell the police was a masterpiece of half truths and lies. As soon as he had gone she was to phone Inspector Haig, screaming hysterically that I had forced my way into her apartment, demanding getaway money and when she protested she had none, forced her at gun point to call Schaeffer and insist that he come over, baiting the trap with a phony story concerning new information.

When Schaeffer arrived, I demanded money of him and when he tried to call the police I turned up the radio and shot him, then, realizing it was hopeless, turned the gun on myself.

"You ought to write stories instead of thieving," I told him. "I bet you'd make more money."

Hanson ignored the crack to ask Zola if she had the story straight. She repeated it, with gestures. Coming from a pretty, crying girl, it wasn't bad.

Zola started for the radio. I stopped her. Still sitting on the ottoman, I said, "There's only one thing wrong with your story, Jack. If it's suicide, there will have to be powder burns. Also, if I have one hundred and fifty thousand worth of easily fenced diamonds, why should I come to Zola for money? Why don't I go to Maxie?"

**ZOLA** stared at me, wide-eyed. Hanson touched the jewel case in his breast pocket. "I'll leave a few small diamonds on your body. You brought them to show Zola

that you had the jewels and offered to sell them all back for a third of the insurance check. More, you'd be a fool to go to Maxie. Haig probably has ten fingers in the pool-room just waiting for you to show."

"And the powder burns?"

He nodded to Zola. "Do as I told you. Turn up that radio."

She dialed in the radio full volume and a milkman's matinee blared out a blast of brass.

"No," Schaeffer cried. "You wouldn't dare!"

But Hanson did—at least he tried. He took three quick steps toward me. I dived off the ottoman at his legs and the slugs whined over my head. Before he could shoot again, I pulled his legs from under him and wrestled him for the gun.

"You fool, you sap," I cursed him. "I have a gun in my pocket. I could have shot you through the cloth. But after what you tried to do to me, I want you to go to the chair."

Then heavy fists pounded on the door and Schaeffer opened it. Haig hauled me to my feet.

"You dirty, bloody, killer," he began, stopped short, his mouth gaping open as Hanson crawled to his feet and retreated across the floor. "You're dead," he managed to gasp.

Hanson scooped up the gun. "The hell you say." Mad with fear, his finger tightened on the trigger before Haig could draw his gun. I shot him through my pocket. "The hell he doesn't. Stay as dead as you are, chump!"

Then everything became confused. I remember Zola crying, Schaeffer shaking my hand, and someone showing me the jewels they had taken from Hanson's pocket. It was hard to stay on my feet. My head and my side both hurt. I wanted to get home to Sherry.

"I was wrong, Matt. I was very wrong," Haig ate crow. "But this is going to make me look like a damn fool. And I'll appreciate it greatly if when the reporters show up you could sort of hint we were working on this together. I assure you that I'll be grateful."

"Oh, you have a price, eh?" I said. "It's pride." Then I relented. What the hell. Haig is a big shot on the Force. I have three mouths to feed. He's done me favors in the past. "You can tell the reporters anything you want to," I told him, "including that I've gone home."

Schaeffer stopped me enroute to the door and pressed a check into my hand. "With my own, and with Amalgamated's, sincere gratitude."

I looked at the figure and whistled. It wasn't bad. It wasn't bad at all.

THE END

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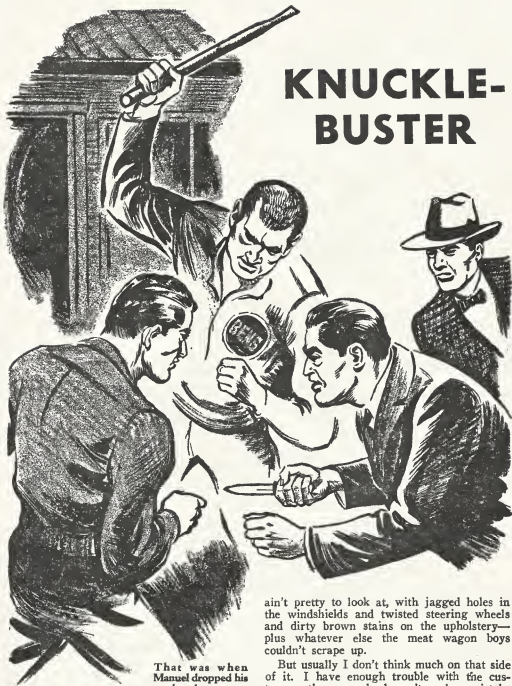
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# KNUCKLE- BUSTER



That was when Manuel dropped his pry-bar down across Motta's wrist.

**I**T'S a hell of a business, making your living off other people's mistakes. And I got a whole graveyard, the biggest one in town, filled with 'em. An acre of junk that

ain't pretty to look at, with jagged holes in the windshields and twisted steering wheels and dirty brown stains on the upholstery—plus whatever else the meat wagon boys couldn't scrape up.

But usually I don't think much on that side of it. I have enough trouble with the customers, the ones who haven't made a mistake yet. At least not their last one. This morning when Sorry Sorkin came in, a young guy was giving me a bad time because he'd bought a Model A head six months ago and now it's cracked. So he wants his two bucks back.

I was glad to have an excuse to ignore the



## By RUSSELL BRANCH

*Cop Sorkin, with at least one murder on his docket, kept quietly snooping around my wrecking yard, until suddenly one guy got the strange chill feeling that maybe Sorkin was trying to make out of those wrecked hot heaps a far too reasonable facsimile of the hot squat!*

kid, so I went over and field out my paw to Sorkin. He doesn't see it, maybe because he's carrying something wrapped in a rag in his right hand. Or maybe just because my hands are as greasy as usual.

"How's tricks, Ben?" he asks me.

I didn't like the way he said it, but then Sorkin's a hard guy to figure out. He's a little squirt with gray hair who goes around looking like he had ate the wrong thing for breakfast.

You see, one way of handling hot cars is to scramble them. . . mix up the bodies and engines and wheels so even the original owners can't say which is which. And when a lot of cars keep disappearing, it's natural the cops are gonna clamp down on the wrecking yards.

But that's not what Sorkin was here for this morning. He took his cigar-butt out of his mouth, looked it over sourly, and then gives me the off-hand treatment. "Ben, you got George Rettzo's car here?"

I pointed out in the yard. "What's left of it."

Sorkin grunted and walked over to it, with me tagging along. It'd been a beautiful 1942 Cad sedan—until yesterday morning it'd gone through a guard rail up in the Hillcrest district and ended up, top first, on the Freeway Pass two hundred feet straight down. The emergency squad had finished the job with their torches in getting at Rettzo's body.

"It's a damned shame," I said.

Sorkin kicked at a white sidewalk tire that looked like somebody had taken an axe to it, and grunted again.

"We can get along without him," he said.

"Naw," I said, "I mean the car. It ain't worth fifty bucks now. How the hell anybody can loose control of a job like that. . .!"

Sorkin looked up then, and his eyes flicked past me. I turned around and saw Manuel standing nearby with his ears hanging out. Manuel did a stretch once and he ain't strong on looks or brains, but then I didn't have to pay him much and he worked hard when I kept on his tail. Behind him was the kid with the cracked head.

I ordered Manuel to go see if he could dig up another Model A lid, and when I looked around again Sorkin had his eyes on me.

"How d'you know how it happened?"

I shrugged. "I don't, Sherlock. All I know

is what I read in the papers—and what the insurance man said."

But the copper wasn't even listening. He had his head down under the crumpled front fender like he was looking for something.

"Besides," I said, "you can't tell anything from a pile of junk like that."

He didn't answer. That's what I mean about Sorkin being hard to figure. He goes around with his brain all wrapped up inside him like it was an ulcer or something.

Instead he straightened up and headed back into the office. Inside he picked up the object he'd come in with, and unwrapped the rag around it.

"What's this?"

I looked to see if he was kidding me, but his face was blank as usual. "A steering knuckle," I told him.

"Yeah, I know that—What's it from?"

I TURNED it over in my hand and gave him a grin. "What's the matter with this wonderful police laboratory I've been hearing about? Last time you were here you were telling me they could take a speck of paint and tell what car it came off. . . the make, model, and maybe the badge number of the guy who put it on."

Sorkin didn't get mad but he didn't crack a smile either. He just waited, and I quit.

"I think it's from a Buick," I said. "A late model Buick. You can check the part number with the agency if you want."

Sorkin took the part back. "That's what the lab told me," he said, wrapping it up again carefully. ". . . a 1941 Buick convertible that was assembled late in the year at Flint, Michigan."

I looked at him hard, but he still wasn't kidding. He was on his way out.

And the kid with the Model A was back. Manuel couldn't find another head, so would it be all right if he took a sixteen inch wire wheel instead?

I told him what to take and where to put it.

YOU'D think that expensive pile of tin was an advance 1947 model, the attention it got. The man from the insurance company was in to look it over again, and two of George Rettzo's boys came around.

Slats Carney is a tall guy with a face like broken concrete and a build like a welter-weight champ. He also packs a gun and talks tough, but it's his pal who really gives me the jitters. Motta is a dainty little hophead with a smooth, flat olive face that's too big for the rest of him. He has black eyes with as much expression in them as a busboy's in a ritzy clip-joint, and a record going back to reform school.

"Whatever you mugs want, I haven't got it," I said. "So scram. I wanna stay in business."

"Take it easy, Ben," he tells me. "We're just here for some information."

"I haven't got any information."

Motta nods delicately toward the front of the yard, and shudders. "That Rettzo's car?"

"It was once," I admitted. I notice that Manuel has moved over close to us and is busy doing nothing useful with a pry-bar, but this time I leave him be.

"How did you get it?" Motta wanted to know.

"What's it to you? You want it for a souvenir or something?"

Motta still didn't change his expression. He looked about as interested as a bar tender mixing a Martini. "I just asked how you happened to get it. I thought the cops would hold it."

I shook my head impatiently. "The guy drove it off the road himself. Maybe he was drunk, but anyway it's between the insurance company and his estate. The insurance company has to pay off, so they get what they can out of it by selling it to a wrecker. I'll be lucky if I make a dime."

"But the bulls are still interested," Motta persisted. "That dick Sorkin was here this morning. What did he want?"

"You better ask him that," I said, and then I saw I'd gone too far.

Motta's eyes didn't change much. Just a sudden gleam, like he'd thought of something interesting, and he had his knife out. He also was a step closer, and the point of the knife was tickling my belly.

That was when Manuel chopped his pry-bar down across Motta's wrist. I didn't know the Guinea could move so fast—I also didn't know it made any difference to him whether I got cut up a bit. Maybe it was just an impulse he regretted later, but anyway I'll give him credit for carrying through with it. Carney stepped forward, his hand going inside his jacket, just in time to catch Manuel's bar across his face. It wasn't a hard swing, just a backhand flip, but it mixed him up for a minute.

And in that minute Lieutenant Sorkin showed up in the office door looking like he wondered where the hell all the help was. It was

the first time in my life I was ever really glad to see a flatfoot.

Motta took time to pick up his knife and then faded out the gate with his right wrist dangling. Slats Carney was after him just as soon as he got his bearings. As for me, I was already as close to Sorkin as I could get.

"Trouble?" he asked, giving me a quick look.

I managed to make my head shake in time with the rest of me. "Just a little argument. A couple of mugs who wanted something for nothing."

Out in the street I heard Motta's car pulling away. He drives a flashy red Chrysler and I recognized the sound because I'd put a couple of dual chrome stacks on it.

But Sorkin didn't seem interested in that any more. He had that broken steering knuckle in his hand again.

"Look, Ben, you said this is from a Buick."

"It's a good guess, anyway," I said. "I've been in this business a long time."

**W**ILL it fit any other car?"

"What do the boys in the laboratory say?"

He let it pass. "I'm asking you. I thought you'd know off-hand."

I shook my head. "I'm not that good, but if it's important I'll try to check."

He nodded, said "Yeah," and I had to oblige. In a few minutes I came back with the information that it was practically the same as a Cadillac steering knuckle. I knew that was what he was driving at anyway.

"If they're the same then," he wanted to know, "how the hell did you know?"

"They're *not* exactly the same," I said, and showed him the difference. "Besides that, the bearing's a bit larger in a Cad. This one might work, but it'd be looser."

I guess I convinced him because he changed the subject. He wandered over to Rettzo's wreck and took another look under the front end. "One more thing," he said, straightening up. "I want the rest of this knuckle. The piece that's still fastened to the post end."

That got me. I'd already had more than my share of pushing around that day.

"Like hell," I said. "That car belongs to somebody else until the insurance company clears it. I won't touch it."

Sorkin looked at me sorrowfully. "Do I have to pull my badge on you, Ben? I'm sure the insurance company wouldn't stand in the way of the police investigation."

I cooled down a bit. "It'll take a torch to get at it, Sorkin. A wrench won't reach it, the way everything's smashed up in there."

That's as far as I got. It seemed Manuel had been taking in the whole pow-wow. . . anyway, there he was, running over with help-

fulness. "I get it off, Lieutenant. I get it. You see."

Good old Manuel, dumb and willing.

Ten minutes later, Sorkin was matching the short end to the piece he already had. The expression on his sour puss was some sort of a record for him. I wouldn't call it a smile, but he did actually look like an old tomcat with a platter of cream.

I looked too, and then said: "So what? The steering knuckle broke and a no-good gangster went off a cliff."

"It doesn't matter who gets killed," Sorkin said quietly. "My job is to find out how it happened."

I laughed in his face and pointed to the two broken ends of the steering knuckle. "Look, Sherlock. Only part of this break is bright—less than half of it. The rest of it's dark, which means that part's had a crack in it for a long time. If you don't believe me, go ask your man with the microscope."

Sorkin studied the pieces for a second longer. Then he looked at me again. "I know what it means, Ben. Rettz was killed accidentally on purpose. We call it murder."

\* \* \*

It was murder all right. I don't mind admitting I was scared when I phoned the police the next morning. My knees had the wobbles like the front wheels of a Model T.

A prowler car got there first, but Sorkin and his buddies from the homicide squad weren't far behind. I led them out back, toward the little shack that Manuel had fixed up.

Manuel's body lay just outside the shack. He had never been a pretty character, but he looked even worse now. Sorkin gave him a casual glance, and then while the other men went to work, he started wandering around in that aimless way of his. I followed him just to give my stomach a chance to settle itself.

"When did you find him, Ben?" he asked over his shoulder.

"When I got here. About fifteen minutes ago."

"How did you happen to come way back here?"

"Manuel was a good worker," I said. "He usually has the gate open and everything all set for business when I get down in the morning. But I was late this morning and nothing had been done, so I went back to call him. I thought maybe he'd gotten hold of a bottle, like he does once in a while."

Sorkin stopped, searched vainly for a match, and I finally handed him one. When he'd got his cigar going evenly, he studied me through the smoke. "You get along with him all right, Ben?"

I shrugged. "Good enough. I gave him a

job when he was eating outa garbage pails. I let him live here in the yard for nothing."

Sorkin chewed off the ragged end of his cigar and spit it out. "I just asked, Ben." Then he added, "It didn't cost you anything, and it meant you had a watchman here."

If Sorkin wanted to put it that way, I wasn't going to argue. "Sure," I said. "You know how those high school kids are . . . well, Manuel chased 'em away several times when they tried to swipe stuff for their jalopies."

"And you didn't have any beefs with him yourself?"

"WE HAD our arguments," I admitted.

Then I began to get sore. "Look, Lieutenant. Yesterday two punks came around and started getting tough. One of them pulled a knife on me, and Manuel sailed into them when he saw what was going on. Maybe he didn't save my life, exactly, but he sure stuck his neck out to tangle with those two lugs."

"Yeah," said Sorkin dryly, "I saw them. Carney and Motta."

"So you wanna know did I kill Manuel?" I said bitterly.

Sorkin's answer wasn't an answer. "They were Rettz's boys. What was the argument about? What did they want?"

"Why the police were still interested in their boss's accident. I told 'em to go to hell, and they didn't like it."

Sorkin grunted again like he does and suddenly bent down. Then he took a handkerchief out of his pocket and picked up something lying on the ground. It was an old pinion gear, a heavy one, and the gear at the end was smeared with blood and hair. He didn't say anything but he didn't have to. It had taken something like that to mess up Manuel the way he was.

Sorkin carried the gear over to the man working on the body. He nodded and straightened up.

"This man was stabbed, too, Lieutenant. He's got a hole in his chest. When we get him in we can probably tell which came first, but it looks to me like he was knocked over the head first and then stabbed on the ground."

I couldn't help butting in then. "Stabbed?" I said. "Motta carries a knife."

Sorkin thought that over and then he asked: "Has he been stiff very long, Doc?"

Doc looked at the body reflectively, and then he grinned at Sorkin. "You want a guess? I'd say he was bumped at twelve-eleven last night." He grinned again and held up an old-fashioned gold watch which I recognized. It had been pretty well smashed, but the hands were still on.

Sorkin grunted skeptically and turned to me. "I suppose you were safe in bed around midnight?"

"Hell no," I shot right back at him. "I was up at the Wagon Wheel with some of the boys."

"Until after midnight?" Sorkin's eyebrows went up. "You do look kind of hungover today, but not that much."

I look coy as all hell. "I hate to confess, Sorkin, but you see . . . well, some of the boys started a friendly little game of stud in the back room, and asked me to sit in."

Sorkin said "Yeah," because he knew as well as I did that those games are neither friendly nor little. "I suppose the game didn't break up until three-thirty, either?"

"Two o'clock. A lot of different guys sat in on it at one time or another, but you might ask Tommy Scoville or Sid Charman. That is, if you wanna waste time. Why don't you save these questions for Carney and Motta? It wouldn't be the first time somebody's been knocked off when they crossed that gang. Or wouldn't you know?"

Sorkin answered as usual with another question. A screwy one. You never know what gives with him. "Ben," he asked me, "have you got a 5/8ths wrench around here?"

I looked at him in amazement. "Sure, I've got one. What's the gag? I suppose you're gonna prove I did that with an end wrench?"

Sorkin didn't say anything. He didn't have to, because just then one of the cops who'd been looking around came out of the shed behind the office.

"I got 'em, Lieutenant," he said, and held out his hand. He had three of my wrenches: a couple of end wrenches and a box wrench with an off-set handle. I didn't have to look at the marking on them to know they were all 5/8ths.

Sorkin turned to me. "We're going to borrow these for a while, if you don't mind."

"Cripes," I exploded. "How do you expect me to do business if you cart off all my tools?"

Sorkin shifted his cigar into high. "You won't be doing much business today, Ben. You're coming with us."

Before the morning was over I got pretty sick of talking. And it's funny, now that they asked me, how little I knew about Manuel. I didn't even know whether he slept in his clothes. And after all, the guy had worked for me for five years. But he never said two words where one would do, and I wasn't much help to the police. I couldn't even tell them where he'd come from or who his friends were. It was like they were asking me about some dumb animal I'd had around and never noticed much.

Finally I got tired of repeating myself and got up.

"Look, boys," I said, "I didn't have any breakfast this morning and I'm hungry. If you're gonna book me for something just say

so and I'll call a lawyer. If you aren't, I'm going to have lunch in that joint across the street. Maybe after eating I'll feel like going on with my song and dance. Anyway, there'll I be if you want me."

Nobody stopped me. Sorkin didn't even look up. He was thinking, as usual; but whether it was about murder or about his domestic troubles I couldn't say.

I had a cold bottle of beer and a hot beef sandwich and began to feel better. In fact, I was just starting in on my second beer when somebody slipped into the other side of the booth.

I groaned. "Look, pal, please don't spoil my lunch. I've already told you everything I know. Instead of needing me, you oughta go out and pick up Motta and Carney. They're probably in another state by now, anyway."

**SORKIN** snagged an empty water glass from the next table and helped himself to the rest of my bottle. Then he shook his head.

"No, they got an alibi."

"Sure!" I snapped. "Sure they got an alibi. Those guys always have. That's probably what caved in Manuel's skull—an alibi."

He held up his hand. "We'll get the guy who killed him. It's this Rettzo accident I'm not satisfied about."

"You saw that steering knuckle," I said. "And there wasn't anybody near Rettzo's car when it jumped that guard rail."

"Let's look at it this way. Rettzo lives up there in the hills. Somebody substitutes that cracked part on purpose, hoping it'll snap sometime, just like it did: on a fast curve. A good bet, and no one the wiser if it doesn't work out."

I nodded and started to speak, but Sorkin wasn't through yet. "You've gotta admit, Ben, it's strange for a car that new to have a steering knuckle on it from another make. Particularly a defective steering knuckle."

I nodded again. "It's a theory, Sorkin, and there are plenty of guys glad to see Rettzo in hell. But you can't hang a guy on theory. Even if you've got a motive, you—"

He interrupted me, sadly. "I've got that too. The guy who did it was mixed up in Rettzo's hot car racket. Rettzo was putting the screws on him, maybe. Anyway he wanted out, so he arranged an accident."

"Sure," I said. "I'll even go along with you that far. But do you think a case like that will ever hold up in court? You think you can convict somebody of murder because he happened to get a defective part when he repaired a car?"

Sorkin made rings on the table with his glass. "I can make it stick when the same guy kills somebody else to shut him up."

(Continued on page 93)



I closed the door behind me and then I saw why Peggy was looking so funny.

# Kill 'Em With Kindness!

By

**ROBERT C. DENNIS**

*Like a tantalizing summer breeze, lovely Peggy blew into Tom Brooks' life. . . . But she was followed—like a blast from Bikini—by Murder, all in twenty-four hours of never-to-be-forgotten heaven and hell.*

**I** WAS light-headed, but that was all. There was no pain anywhere. I kept my hand under my suit coat, holding it tight against my left shoulder, but it wasn't really necessary. There was no pain.

That would come later, I thought, probably in the cold, dark hours toward dawn. Now, there was just that funny light-headedness like the time I smoked my first cigarette down behind the barn.

I stood there on a street corner, trying to remember where my hotel was. I'd never been in Chicago before, or any big city for that matter, but I wasn't really lost. Sooner or later somebody would come along the street

and I'd ask directions. But I didn't want to wait too long. It was already nearly midnight, and a damp miserable wind had scared everybody indoors. So I stepped down off the curb very carefully and crossed the street to a tavern.

It wasn't a very big place. There were only two customers there, but they both turned on their stools and looked at me. One, a fat man, was too drunk really to be interested. The other was a girl in a red dress that wouldn't have been considered very proper in McKinley, but it looked kind of pretty on her. She gave me a nice, friendly smile as if she knew me, though of course she didn't.

Seeing her and having her smile at me like that cleared my mind and made me think of Esther. And the moment the light-headedness went away my shoulder started to hurt so bad I had to hold on to the edge of the bar. It was just like having a red-hot pitch-fork stab me.

"You better call it a night, friend!" the bartender said. "You've had your quota!" He had a tired, kindly face like the men back home after a very hard long day following a plough.

"Please," I said. "Would you mind calling the doctor? I've been shot."

I took my hand out from under my coat and there was so much blood it started to drip off right away. The bartender gave a startled swear word and the girl in the red dress drew in her breath so sharply it was like a little cry. I was kind of scared myself, then. I hadn't known I was bleeding so bad.

"What the hell happened?" the bartender demanded. He was busy pouring me a drink of whiskey while he talked. "Who shot you?"

"I don't know," I said. "A hold-up man, I guess."

The girl had come along the bar and was standing beside me now. She said to the bartender, "Don't stand there, Art! Call a doctor before he bleeds to death."

"Sure—sure!" the bartender mumbled. He put the whiskey in front of me and ran toward the back of the room. I drank my whiskey, but just to be polite. I didn't really want it. I just wanted a doctor.

"We've got to stop that bleeding!" the girl said. "Come on with me."

She took my arm as if she were afraid I was going to fall over. I could smell her perfume because it was kind of strong but it smelled nice too. She was a nice girl. Just seeing the worry in her eyes made me feel so good I didn't really mind being shot.

I wondered what Esther would say if I should call her up and tell her about it. Maybe it would make a difference. Maybe she would stop thinking of me as a hayseed she'd known in her home town. I knew she wouldn't, though. She didn't appreciate anything I did, I thought bitterly.

The girl in the red dress took me into the men's room and made me sit down. I was kind of embarrassed, but she wasn't. She helped me get my suit coat off and there was a little catch in her breath when she saw how much blood there was. But she didn't get sick or faint. Lots of the girls in McKinley had killed and dressed enough fowl not to be bothered by the sight of blood, but I didn't think a city girl would be so calm and collected. She helped me get my shirt off, too.

"Hey, where'd you get those shoulders?"

"Working in the fields, I guess," I said. I

knew she was trying to take my mind off the wound but that wasn't necessary. I was big and pretty hard to hurt.

SHE started making wet compresses with paper towels. "I think the bullet went right through," she said. "If it didn't hit a bone you ought to be all right." She lowered her voice, although there was no one else there to overhear. "It's none of my business, but you want to have a story ready. Art called the cops—he wouldn't dare not report it. They're going to want to know who did it."

"But I don't know who he was," I told her. "I don't know anybody in Chicago—except a girl from my home town."

"Where you from?" she asked.

"McKinley. About four hundred miles from here. I just got in this morning."

"Oh, I see. You came here to see your girl."

Esther wasn't really my girl. I just worked for her father, Dan Johnston. I never really went with her. I had taken her to a couple of dances in McKinley last year but I was too busy learning all there was to know about dairy farming to have much time for girls.

I didn't have much money either; Dan Johnston was about the stingiest man I'd ever known. He owned the biggest dairy farm in our end of the state but that didn't make any difference. He and Esther had fought about money more than once. In fact, that was why she'd left home and moved to Chicago. After she was gone, I'd started thinking more about her than when she was around.

The girl in the red dress was looking at me, so I said, "I guess I did kind of like her once. She used to write and tell me about the fine times she was having here in Chicago. She made McKinley sound pretty dull."

"I know the type," the girl murmured.

I didn't know what she meant by that. "She stopped writing before long, though," I said. She never had written to her father, so I didn't know what she was doing, or anything. I guess maybe I worried about her so much that I thought I was in love with her. Maybe I was in love with her then. Now I hated her.

Art, the bartender, stuck his head in the door. "How's she coming, friend? A doc will be here pretty quick." He looked at the girl. "You better do a scam when you hear the siren, Peg."

She just nodded, more intent on my shoulder than in the arrival of the police. I wondered if she had to leave before they came because she was too young to be in a tavern. She looked pretty young, but she didn't act young. I couldn't have guessed her age.

When Art went away again, she said, "Your girl stopped writing and you couldn't stand it any longer, so you came looking for her?"



"Something like that," I admitted.

About a week or so ago Esther had written to her father saying she needed a couple of hundred dollars. She needed it bad, she said. She must have, to write to Dan for it! He'd never give her two hundred dollars any time, and especially not after running away like she did. Dan told me about her letter.

"She can starve for all of me!" he'd growled. We had words over it.

"What's your name?" the girl asked suddenly.

"Tom Brooks."

"Mine's Peggy Russell. Go on with your story. You came to see her. What happened then?"

"There was more to it than that," I said. "I came because she needed money but her dad wouldn't send any. She wrote to me about it."

"You know, I was sort of expecting that!" Peggy said.

"Oh, she didn't ask me for money," I said quickly. "I—didn't have any. Dan doesn't pay very much and anyhow I'm buying a share in the farm. I own a tenth now. Some day I'll have a half interest."

Peggy patted my good shoulder. "That's swell! A gentleman farmer, huh? . . . So Esther didn't try to borrow money—what did she write about?"

I was feeling pretty weak by then. I wished that doctor would hurry. "She didn't say very much, really. Just that things were pretty bad and her father wouldn't help her and she didn't know what she was going to do. I got the feeling she wanted me to try talking to Dan, but I'd already done that. So I did the only thing I could."

Peggy took the compress away from my shoulder and her eyes were sharp. "What did you do?" she demanded.

"I took two hundred dollars out of Dan's desk and brought it to Chicago."

"Why, you dope!" she exclaimed. "What in—why did you pull a dumb trick like that!"

"For Esther, I guess," I said, weakly. After what had happened, I felt pretty silly about it. "I couldn't let her down, could I?"

Peggy gave me a long, queer look. She had nice blue eyes that seemed to see a lot and understand a lot. "No, I guess you couldn't, Tom," she said in a quiet voice. "I'm sorry. You're not a dope. I'd just forgotten something. . . . What happened?"

I didn't know how to explain it. I hadn't understood then and I still didn't. Esther hadn't needed the money at all! I'd found her address, on Diversey Street, a big, kind of fancy apartment. Esther was wearing some nice clothes and she didn't need the money at all! She had laughed at me! Told me to go back to McKinley. She'd sounded kind of mad, too.

I tried not to think about it. I didn't know I could hate anyone so much.

"I'D MADE a mistake," I told Peggy. "Esther didn't need the money, so I came away. That's all there was to it."

"When did you get shot?"

It had happened just after I left Esther's place. "A man came 'up behind me," I said. "He didn't make much noise but I heard him and turned around. I saw a gun in his hand. I knew he was going to hold me up so I rushed him. I was a lot bigger than he was and I didn't think he'd ever use the gun but I guess he got rattled. It happened so fast I didn't know I was shot at first. I got in one pretty good punch and knocked the gun out of his hand. He ran away then. I threw his gun down a sewer. I couldn't find my hotel, so I came in here to get directions."

Peggy stopped working on my shoulder, stepped back and stared at me with her hands on her hips. "I don't know," she said at last. "I'd never get away with a story like that. But maybe you will. Yes, I guess they'll believe you, all right. You're not the type to dream it up."

The bleeding had almost stopped now but



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my shoulder was getting stiff. I wanted to go back to my hotel and go to bed. But I knew I'd have to wait till the police got here. I wished they'd hurry.

"What's going to happen when you get back home?" Peggy asked.

I shrugged my shoulders and winced at the pain. "I don't know. Dan'll be pretty sore. I guess he'll fire me."

"You mean you'll never own half that farm?" She soaked another wad of paper towel. "Look," she said suddenly. "Why don't you call up this guy you swiped the dough from. Call him long distance. Make a deal—if he'll forget the whole thing, you'll come back with his two hundred."

THAT sounded like a pretty good idea. If I talked fast enough, Dan might agree to it. I did most of the work around the farm and I knew he wouldn't want to lose me. But most of all he wouldn't want to lose that two hundred.

"Call right now," Peggy urged. She was looking at something that wasn't even in that room. "I had a chance to live on a farm once. I wish now . . . go and call, Tom."

The phone booth was just outside the men's room. I nearly fell asleep, waiting to get the call through. Finally somebody said, "Yeah, who is it?"

"Tom Brooks," I said. "Is that you, Dan?"

The voice changed abruptly. "This is Ike Stafford, Tom. Where the hell are you?"

"In Chicago, Ike." He was the town constable. I couldn't figure out what he was doing at the farm at that hour of the night. "Where's Dan?"

Ike took a long time to answer. I had an idea he was whispering to somebody standing beside him. "Dan had an accident. . . You comin' home, Tom?"

"Sure," I said. "I'll be home tomorrow, Ike. What happened to Dan?"

There was another pause and this time I could hear the mumble of his voice but he must have had his hand over the mouthpiece because I couldn't make out anything he said.

"Dan got shot tonight. Somebody put a bullet through his head about an hour ago. . . You're sure you're in Chicago, Tom?"

I didn't answer. I couldn't. Ike kept talking and yelling and that bothered me so much I finally hung up in his ear. I just couldn't get my brain to accept what I'd heard—Dan Johnston was dead. Shot. That was murder! I thought. Who would do a thing like that? A lot of people around McKinley didn't like Dan but I didn't think anyone hated him. Not that much at least. I left the phone booth and stumbled back into the men's room.

When I opened the door Peggy was standing over by the wash bowl, facing me. She

had the queerest expression on her face. She didn't speak or move, just stood there, very still, staring at me with wide blue eyes.

"Dan's dead," I told her blankly. "Somebody killed him." I closed the door behind me and then I saw why Peggy was looking so funny. A man was standing there, holding a gun. The same man who shot me earlier this evening.

"Don't make any false moves," he whispered. "I'll shoot her first."

"What do you want?" I asked, keeping my voice down. "What's the big idea?"

He ignored my questions. "You're going to sneak out the back door without anybody seeing you. If you keep close to the wall the phone booth will cover you. When you get outside, stand and wait. Me and her will be right behind you. If you try anything, she'll get it. Keep that in mind!"

He wasn't a very big man. His face was thin, hard looking, and he had eyes like a mean horse. One side of his face was puffed up where I'd hit him just after he shot me. Even though I knew he wouldn't hesitate to shoot me again I wasn't afraid of him. I was so much bigger and stronger. But I couldn't take a chance on Peggy getting hurt.

I was trying to kill time because I could hear a siren not very far away. That must be the police coming here, I thought. But the little man heard it too. His face got tense and he took a step toward me, gesturing with the gun.

There wasn't anything I could do. Not with Peggy there. I was just going to turn away when something smacked suddenly on the side of the man's face. It was the compress of wet paper towels that Peggy had been holding. It hit him right where his face was swollen and I knew it must have hurt. He gave a strangled cry and swung toward Peggy.

He merely started to turn. That same instant he remembered he mustn't take his eyes off me. But he remembered it a second too late. I landed a pretty fair punch on the good side of his face.

I hit him square, at least. There just didn't seem to be much force behind it. I was weaker than I thought. The jar of the blow hurt me almost as much as it did him.

If it hadn't been for Peggy it would have been too bad for me. She leaped at him, scratching and kicking and biting. It wasn't very ladylike but it worked fine. Before the man could get away from Peggy I was there to get in another punch or two.

The noise brought Art on the run. Tight behind him were a couple of men in white coats. They all jumped in and after that the little man just didn't have a chance.

The white-coated men were internes from an emergency hospital. They took charge of

me then. I was so weak and dizzy I didn't notice much more. Two policemen had shown up too.

I was loaded into an ambulance before I remembered Peggy. It was too late then. She wasn't in sight. I passed out sometime during the ride.

**DURING** the night the doctor patched me up. The bullet hadn't hit a bone, so the wound wasn't serious, but it hurt like the devil. Around noon the next day a detective came in and listened to my story.

When I finished, he nodded. "It ties up all right with that McKinley business."

"Dan Johnston?" I exclaimed. "Have they found out who killed him?"

"Sure. We arrested his daughter this morning."

"Esther?" I didn't believe it. It was ridiculous. At first, but not after the detective explained.

Esther's boy friend had done the actual killing, but it had been her idea. She wanted to get the dairy farm because she knew it would sell for close to fifty thousand. But since she would be the heir she knew she would be under suspicion right away and an investigation might turn up her boy friend. He already had a police record. So they planned to frame me!

That was the girl I'd once been in love with!

She wrote that letter knowing I'd go to bat for her with Dan and that would start a fight. Some of the hired hands would be sure to overhear, so that would be the motive. Then Saturday—yesterday—the boy friend drove to McKinley and late last night got Dan's big old horse pistol out of his closet and shot him. Nobody knew about that pistol except Esther and me, so that would be proof I'd done it.

I broke out in a sweat thinking of the spot I'd have been in, trying to prove I hadn't done it. Because on Saturday nights I wandered around McKinley, maybe having a glass of beer, and didn't go home till late. Dan was always in by ten, even on Saturday nights and he was all alone there. Esther knew my habits and her Dad's so well that it was a foolproof plan—except for one thing.

She never expected I'd steal the money and take it to her. She didn't know I was that much in love with her.

When I showed up in Chicago instead of being in McKinley, it threw the frame all out of shape. They tried to repair the damage, she and the boy friend's brother. Alex was his name. He'd been in Esther's apartment in another room all the time I was there and he followed me when I left. Their plan was to knock me out and then rush me as fast as they could to McKinley.

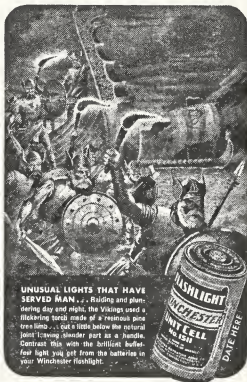
I guess they intended to shoot me and leave

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my body not far from the scene of Dan's murder. Everyone would then think I'd committed suicide after killing Dan. But I'd rushed Alex when he tried to kill me and the shot only wounded me.

"We've already got a confession from this guy Alex," the detective said. "The boy friend got the wind up, I guess, because he hasn't shown up at the girl's apartment yet. But we'll get him. He's either here in town or just on his way back from McKinley."

He went away after awhile and about three o'clock the hospital released me. My time table showed the next train to McKinley left at four-thirty. That gave me an hour and a half. It took me half of that time to find Art's tavern.

I asked him if he knew where Peggy Russell lived.

"Peg?" he said. "I don't know where she lives but I got her phone number. You want it?"

"Please," I said.

He had a funny look on his tired, kindly face as if he didn't know whether he should give it to me or not. I wondered then if Peggy was his girl; or maybe he was in love with her, though he was pretty old. He gave me a piece of paper with the number on it. He started mopping up the bar and he didn't say anything. He didn't say anything at all.

I went back to the phone booth and dialed the number. When I heard her voice I said, "Peggy—this is Tom Brooks. I want to talk to you."

"I'm pretty busy," she said. "Tell me what happened."

I told her everything the detective had told me. "I don't know who the farm will go to now, but I'll be in charge, I guess."

"That's swell, Tom," she said. "That's wonderful."

"Where will you meet me, Peggy? I'm leaving in an hour."

She took a long time to answer. "I'll come to the station," she said. "In twenty minutes I'll be there."

I told her which one and where I'd be. Then I went back to my hotel and got my suitcase. A cab took me to the station. I was trembling a little at the thought of seeing Peggy again. I wanted to see her more than anything in the world. I hoped she'd be wearing the same red dress. . .

The twenty minutes trickled by but she didn't come. I waited another ten minutes and then found a phone booth and called her apartment again. There was no answer. I called information and asked the girl for Peggy's address but she said she wasn't allowed to give out addresses. I went back out to the gate where I'd told her I'd be. At five min-

utes to train time she still hadn't appeared.

She never came. I waited till the very last second, thinking of a lot of ways of finding her but none were any good. I was pretty sure Art wouldn't tell me and I couldn't just wait in his bar till she came. Art would let her know I was there and she'd never come. I didn't know why, I just knew she wouldn't. But one thing was good. Just knowing there were nice girls like Peggy balanced up for Esther. I took out the piece of paper containing her phone number and tore it into tiny shreds and scattered the shreds on the floor. It hurt a lot worse than my shoulder ever did.

Then without any more fussing I picked up my suitcase and went out to catch the train to McKinley.

**I**T WAS the longest trip I'd ever taken—a million miles long. I tried not to think at all. When that didn't work, I tried to think of something else—*anything*. But always my mind came back to Peggy.

When the train pulled into McKinley, I got out and stood on the platform, and even then when I looked at a girl getting off one of the other coaches it was Peggy I saw. Every girl whom I would see was going to remind me of Peggy—

And then I saw it was *Peggy*! I dropped my suitcase and started stumbling toward her. I wanted to put my arms around her, to see if she was real. Even then I didn't really believe it.

"Tom," she said, "I—I—" I thought she was going to break down and cry, but she didn't. She smiled instead, a kind of weak smile. "I came to the station—but I stayed out of sight. I just wanted to see you once more. Then all of a sudden I was on the train." She pushed her hair back off her forehead with the palm of her hand. "I guess I was crazy. I never intended to get off here. But I—I just did—"

Right there on the station platform, for all of McKinley to see, I put my arms around her. I knew in a flash it was what I should do, though I didn't understand how I knew it. Everything just seemed awful clear, as if I knew all there was to know, all about Peggy and about the past and the future. And with Peggy holding on to me as tight as she could and crying very quietly, I knew the future was going to be good.

Maybe it was all tied up with that red dress. She wasn't wearing it now. The one she had on was white, with a high, round neck. She looked like any of the girls around McKinley. Except Peggy was a million times prettier!

# The Finger points-- to Murder!



## A HOG SQUEALED MURDER

ON JUNE 2, 1931, THE R.F.D. CARRIER NOTIFIED DAVID WILLIS OF A 15-DAY ACCUMULATION OF MAIL IN THE BOX OF ELIJAH AND MYRTLE BRAMBLET WHO RENTED THE RANCH ACROSS THE ROAD FROM WILLIS IN IOWA.

THEY INVESTIGATED AND FOUND MRS. BRAMBLET'S DECOMPOSING BODY. SHE HAD BEEN SHOT WITH A SHOT GUN.

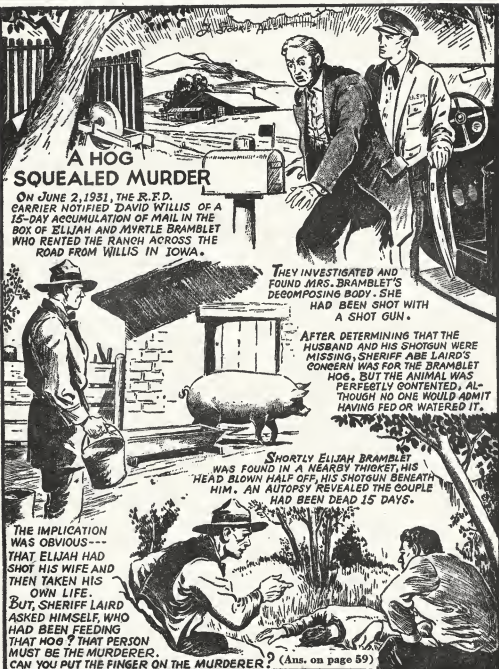
AFTER DETERMINING THAT THE HUSBAND AND HIS SHOTGUN WERE MISSING, SHERIFF ABE LAIRD'S CONCERN WAS FOR THE BRAMBLET HOG. BUT THE ANIMAL WAS PERFECTLY CONTENTED, ALTHOUGH NO ONE WOULD ADMIT HAVING FED OR WATERED IT.

SHORTLY ELIJAH BRAMBLET WAS FOUND IN A NEARBY THICKET, HIS HEAD BLOWN HALF OFF, HIS SHOTGUN BENEATH HIM. AN AUTOPSY REVEALED THE COUPLE HAD BEEN DEAD 15 DAYS.

THE IMPLICATION WAS OBVIOUS--- THAT ELIJAH HAD SHOT HIS WIFE AND THEN TAKEN HIS OWN LIFE.

BUT, SHERIFF LAIRD ASKED HIMSELF, WHO HAD BEEN FEEDING THAT HOG? THAT PERSON MUST BE THE MURDERER.

CAN YOU PUT THE FINGER ON THE MURDERER? (Ans. on page 59)



# THREE THOUSAND



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Return of the Native

ACKER stood in a vestibule of the Anthracite Express. A worried brakeman leaned against the coach door studying the fat pocket watch all trainmen seem to carry. It was just noon.

The Diesel locomotive blasted its air horns and the sound was hurled back by the wooded hills in a series of diminishing echoes. Brake shoes began to grind against coach wheels.

"I've been on this run seven years," said the brakeman, "and we never stopped at Valley View before. You must have pull."

"I soldiered with one of your big bosses."

Acker's voice was low and soft, but bore an undertone of suppressed fury. His eyes were brown, with rippling pinpoints of yellowness. A tropical sun had scorched his face to a leathery hue. He was rather short and very lean, like a fighter trained to a fine edge.

The train slowed. Through the window they saw the vast array of railroad gondolas awaiting shuttling to coal mine tipples. The scene beyond was a dreary vista of huge slate piles.

The brakeman opened the vestibule door and trap. Crisp autumn air swirled through the opening. Acker's face had grayed and a fluttering neck artery betrayed the tumult of his heart.

"Make it quick!" pleaded the brakeman. "There's a fast freight behind. I'll pass down the suitcases."

The red brick depot appeared. The unexpected and unheralded stop of the express had caught the station agent flatfooted. He was probably home for dinner. The only per-





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# FALSE PROPHETS

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By  
**ALAN RITNER  
ANDERSON**

*Instead of a "Welcome Home, Earl Acker" sign, the good folk of Valley View greeted this leather-hued veteran with clubs, curses and a coiled noose! But Earl had figured on that, and gave himself twelve hours to discover whether Acker was to be a blazing symbol of integrity or a murder-stained name on a tombstone.*

**A Compelling Murder  
Novelette**



Canton's slow deliberate advance was partly designed to unnerve his opponent.



son near the depot was Jessop, the village drunk, who was perched on a nail keg outside the waiting room door. The old soak's face was foolish with astonishment.

The train stopped. Acker hopped down and turned just as the brakeman handed him the two heavy suitcases. Air brakes hissed, Diesels throbbled, and the train swiftly started away.

Acker carried the suitcases over to the platform. Jessop was very drunk. He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty some, whose thin face was a maze of ruptured blood vessels. The vacant stare of his watery blue eyes was replaced by a glimmer of recognition.

"Earl Acker," he cackled. "Come back to get hanged proper. That is, if Cantlon don't stick a knife in your back first."

"Shut up!" snapped Earl Acker between clenched teeth.

The curt command whiplashed through Jessop's fuddled brain and the sudden flare of yellow in the eyes staring at him brought a moment of sobriety.

"I was jest jokin'," he whined.

"Shut up!"

Jessop shut up.

Acker shouldered the door open and entered the deserted waiting room. The depot faced the block square city park—a grassy area with a few towering trees and gravel paths radiating from a central fountain. Because it was dimertime, the benches flanking the paths were empty. The business district fronted the park. The hotel was directly across the park from the depot.

A black sedan braked to a sudden stop in front of the station. Police Chief Povering climbed out to investigate the unexpected stop of the Anthracite Express.

Earl Acker put down the heavy suitcases. Povering waddled into the waiting room; a short, big bellied man in a dirty blue uniform. The Sam Brown belt that supported his holstered .45 automatic, however, glittered from much loving care.

Povering spotted Acker, stopped. The rudeness left the chief's chubby cheeks and his gray eyes frosted. His face went deadpan.

"You," was all he said.

"Me," Earl Acker replied.

Povering's suddenly alert eyes took in the neat gray suit, the tropical sunburn, the golden glint of a discharge button.

"So you come back," he said, his voice soft. "You made a bad mistake to come back."

"I've got a score to settle with Valley View."

"Three thousand to one's big odds," Povering sneered. "Folks ain't forgot. They ain't changed their minds either."

"I've thought of it for five years," said Acker, his voice tense. "Every waking hour

for five years. I've come back to set things straight."

HE PICKED up his bags. Povering's bulk filled the doorway. The chief was not very bright. He needed time to think things out, was incapable of making snap decisions.

"Get out of my way!"

Povering was a tough man. But some quality in Acker's voice made the hair at the nape of his neck stiffen. He stepped aside. It was the last thing in the world he intended to do.

Earl Acker crossed over to the park. Povering stood watching, still puzzling over his instant obedience. Jessop was sidling into the bar next to the station where his news would be worth whiskey.

Acker circled the park fountain. Four boys were grouped around a bench beneath a big elm staring up at a branch some ten feet above the bench.

The swarthy fifteen-year-old pointed up at the limb.

"They threw a rope over it," he said. "Then they stood him on this bench and my old man put the noose around his neck."

"What's a noose?" asked a small fry with a running nose.

Acker put down his bags. The swarthy boy demonstrated a noose with a piece of string.

"Then a lot of guys grabbed the rope," he went on.

"When was this, huh?" asked the small fry.

"Five years ago. And shut up! Well, they pulled. They yanked the man halfway up to the branch."

"Then what?" someone asked as the boy hesitated.

"Aw, hell," he said, spat in disgust. "That was when the state troopers came and stopped it. They took the man away."

The boy seemed ashamed and chagrined that the story had such an unsatisfactory ending. His audience, however, was properly awed and viewed the scene with relish.

Acker picked up his bags and started toward the hotel.

"You look like Steve Cantlon's kid," he said as he passed the swarthy boy.

"He's my old man."

"Tell him I'm back in town," Acker suggested.

"Okay. Hey, who are you, mister?"

Earl Acker twisted his head around.

"I'm the man your father almost strung up," he said. "Just tell the old man I'm back."

The Cantlon kid looked as if he were about to be sick. Then he started for home on the run.

Acker entered the tiny lobby of the hotel. Sam, the Negro porter, was dusting a table top. His eyes rolled and showed a lot of white when he recognized the guest. The desk

clerk was new—a timid looking young man with a mustache.

"Room and bath. Overlooking the park, if possible," Acker said. He put down the bags. Sam came over and stood behind them.

The clerk produced registry blank and fountain pen. Earl Acker signed just as the street door flew open. A plump little man in a loud plaid suit breezed into the lobby and whipped off his hat. His bald skull made his pink ears seem enormous. A diamond ring on his right hand flashed fire.

"Good afternoon, Mister Boyland," smirked the clerk. Sam bared his teeth in a wide grin, as he did to all big tippers.

"Call me Bill," said the plump man with a chuckle. "Howdy, stranger, as they say out west. Have a beer with me. I'm a coffee peddler. Have a beer with a coffee peddler!"

Acker frowned. It was plain that this unexpected development annoyed him. He gave the invitation considerable deliberation. It was difficult to refuse the puppy-dog friendliness of Bill Boyland's kind.

"Soon as I unpack," Acker finally agreed, introduced himself.

"You've got looks, Earl," said Boyland, handing everyone a cigar. "Just the partner I need to wolf with. You pick the chicks. I'll foot the bill and put up the car. Me, I'm woman-crazy. I like 'em all."

Sam chortled in glee as he picked up the bags and led the way up the carpeted stairs. Acker registered annoyance as Boyland fol-

lowed him up telling the world what a hot coffee salesman he was.

The front bedroom was spacious and attractively furnished. Sam accepted Acker's tip with marked reluctance as if it had been tendered by a zombie. He backed out and closed the door.

Bill Boyland perched on the edge of the bed.

"Me, I'm not hot on looks. But I'm a good spender. Why. . ."

A thunderous knock interrupted him. Acker stiffened. Then he went to the door and opened it. Chief Povering strutted into the room. He'd mulled things over had reached some sort of decision.

Boyland waved a chubby hand, said, "Howdy, chief."

Povering nodded at the salesman, grinned.

"What do you want?" Earl Acker asked.

"I come to search your stuff for a gun," Povering announced.

Bill Boyland gulped, sat ramrod straight.

"Why?" asked Acker.

Povering studied the fingernails of his right hand.

"If you've got a gun you'd be apt to knock off Steve Cantlon."

The chief beamed, as-if he'd performed a prodigious mental feat.

SAM had placed the suitcases on the rack at the foot of the bed. Acker went there, unstrapped, unlatched, unlocked them. He wanted

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to impress Povering with the fact that the bags hadn't been opened.

"Help yourself!" he invited in a bored tone of voice.

Povering looked as if Acker had dealt him a dirty double-cross. The chief went over and opened the first suitcase. It contained clothing, a toilet kit, magazines. His exploring hands found no weapon.

He opened the lid of the second suitcase, stepped back in astonishment. He saw a thick sheaf of photographs of greatly enlarged fingerprints, twenty odd glossy prints of a fire-guitted gasoline service station, a plaster cast of the impression made by a hobnail shoe.

"Not even a bean shooter," said Acker.

Povering glanced into the suitcase, looked up at Acker with questioning eyes. Seeing that no explanations were forthcoming, he said, "Packin' a gun?"

Earl Acker began to empty his pockets. He placed their contents on the bedspread. Each pocket he turned inside out. Povering stood right beside him to make sure he didn't miss a pocket. The bed held the usual array of stuff a man likes to have on his person.

Povering picked up the bulging wallet, rifled the thick stack of bank notes with his fat thumb.

"Quite a roll," he said.

"Fifteen hundred," Acker admitted. "Money buys most anything. Even some people."

Povering reddened. But he refused to find anything personal in the statement.

Bill Boyland stood up and plucked nervously at his chin. He was embarrassed and at a loss as to how to act.

"Stick around, Boyland," said Acker.

Boyland smiled, relieved to have his problem solved.

There was a sharp rap at the door—two more.

"I'll get it," said Boyland, anxious to do something.

He opened the door, said, "Hey!" followed up with an appreciative whistle.

The blonde wore black. She was small and trim and the black suit and hat highlighted her amber hair. Her lovely oval face was solemn as her gray-green eyes surveyed the room.

"Remember me?" she asked Acker.

"Doc Grayson's kid," he admitted. "Vicki Grayson. A steady customer. Five years treated you well."

She smiled with pleasure, said, "I got my journalism degree from Columbia. I'm on the *Gazette*."

Povering beamed, said, "She's a ball of fire reporter."

"A ball of fire—period," said Bill Boyland.

Vicki Grayson's eyes clouded.

"Steve Cantlon's drinking," she said.

"When he starts daylight drinking it means trouble. Right, Chief?"

"Yeah," admitted Povering uneasily. "Guess it does."

"It's Saturday," she reminded them. "The rip-snorting drunk night in Valley View when anything can happen. Like five years ago. That was when you got locked in your own cell block, wasn't it, Chief?"

"At the point of a gun," Povering mumbled, looking doleful. He made a great show of fishing out his watch, studied the face of it as if it were marked in Sanskrit. He said, "Got to run along."

He seemed rather surprised that no one voiced a protest. He was so glad to leave that he marched out with the watch in his hand. The door slammed closed.

Vicki Grayson said, "I was a seventeen-year-old high school brat when it happened. I didn't think you guilty. I don't think you're guilty now. I'm on your team."

Acker smiled and his whole face softened. He said, "Thanks."

Bill Boyland said, "For heavens sakes tell me the score!"

Vicki Grayson looked at him rather dubiously.

Acker rammed his hands into his pants pockets, glared at the floor. He spoke in a harsh, flat voice.

"Valley View thinks I murdered my wife. But I didn't. That's why I came back. I've got to find the murderer or go nuts. It's hell to live, knowing that three thousand people hate your guts."

There was a brief, electric silence.

Vicki Grayson said, "Cantlon knows your back. He's a hot headed Corsican. A death for a death is his code."

"Who's Cantlon?" Boyland asked.

"He owns the town hot spot—The Silver Dollar," she explained. "Dancing nightly. Gambling in the basement on the Q.T. Numbers written. Bets on the ponies nicely covered."

"My wife worked for him," Acker said. "She managed the public rooms and did all his bookkeeping. I'd sunk my dough in a service station a mile and a half from town with living quarters in rear. She had a wonderful personality. Everybody liked her."

"Did you?" asked Vicki Grayson very softly.

Acker jerked his head erect. "I liked her fine," he said. "I didn't love her. We both married to have a home. We were both orphans. You two don't know what a home means to an orphan. It's a castle in Spain, a dream come true. Why did you have to ask me that?"

Vicki Grayson said, "It's been said that you wanted to run out on her."

## CHAPTER TWO

## The Corsican Killer

**NUTS!**" Acker snapped. "I was working sixteen hours a day getting my station established. I didn't have time to cheat."

"Was . . . ah," Boyland began.

Vicki Grayson surmised his question, said, "She was faithful. There were no other men. You see, it had to be Acker."

"What happened?" asked the salesman.

Earl Acker closed his eyes.

"I came in town shortly after midnight to meet the twelve-twenty bus that was bringing me parts. My wife had our coupe at The Silver Dollar. I had the Chevy pick-up. Bars close at midnight in this state. I got home about half past twelve. The coupe was in the drive. All the house lights were out."

"Was that unusual?"

"Yes. But I'd been having trouble with my air compressor motor. It'd been blowing fuses. I stepped into the house. That's the last I remembered until I came to with Povering and two of his men there. My wife was on the floor shot through the heart. I had the murder gun in my hand. It was an old .38 I kept in the cash register."

"It couldn't have been worse," Boyland admitted.

"Well, they took me to jail. The news spread. A mob got organized. They locked Povering in a cell and dragged me out. It was Cantlon who put the noose around my neck. The state troopers arrived just as I was being strung up. I never did find out who called the state police barracks."

"Who tipped Povering off?" Boyland asked.

"Two tourists from Maine. They'd found all the lights on and stopped for gas. They found my wife dead and me unconscious beside her."

"How'd you ever get acquitted?"

"I went to trial in a strange town. The state police had taken me to their barracks and made a Dermal Nitrate Test. This consisted of making a paraffin cast of the back of my hands. If the gun fired is old and the breech loose, like mine was, particles of unburned powder would have struck my hand and the paraffin would have removed them. I hadn't fired the gun."

"You could have worn gloves."

"Lucky for me, the troopers searched the house that night. Then there was the blow on my head. That was in my favor. I was set free. The war was on. That rated top priority. I just got out last week."

Vicki Grayson said, "Valley View doesn't cotton to scientific methods. They think Acker's lawyer pulled a fast one. You see,

apparently no one but Acker could have had a motive."

Acker's voice was edged with bitterness. "They burned my station down while I was in jail. I was cleaned out, busted. My wife's insurance just covered the funeral."

Vicki Grayson walked over to the window and peered out. They heard her gasp.

"It's started," she said. "The news is out."

Acker sided up to the window and peered out. The park and sidewalks were filled with small groups of women. They were talking, gesturing, now and then looking at the hotel front. One old woman raised her fist and shook it in their direction.

Vicki Grayson said, "The mines are running until three today."

"That's a break," Acker said.

"They'll needle their men folks at dinner," Vicki Grayson said. "Cantlon will whip the gang at The Silver Dollar to a fury. Be sensible! Leave town!"

"No," said Acker stubbornly. He opened and closed his hands and his mouth tightened. He said, "It's started too soon."

The phone rang. The three of them stiffened. Boyland had begun to sweat.

Acker went over and answered the phone, said, "Hello! Acker speaking." There was a brief silence and the earphone gave off a cackling noise. "A hundred dollars," Acker said. "Sure, if it's worth it." He hung up.

"Jessop," he explained. "He's got information to sell. I'm to meet him after dark."

"You better be . . ." Vicki Grayson began.

The glassy crash interrupted her. The window pane exploded into the room and fragments of it danced and skidded across the rug. Cold wind fluttered the drapes and rattled the curtain. The shrill murmur of women's voices reached them.

"Too soon," said Acker. "It's come too soon."

Then came unexpected salvation!

It began to rain.

A few drops pattered down. Then came a veritable deluge. They heard feminine squeals of distress, the furious clicking of high heels as the women scurried for cover.

Earl Acker began stuffing the articles on the bed into his pockets. He took some of the money from the wallet and transferred it to his pocket.

"Save it for me," he said, handing Vicki Grayson the wallet.

She nodded, slipped the wallet into her purse.

Bill Boyland was aquiver with excitement.

**L**ET me do something," he urged Earl. "Can you park my bags in your room until it's all over?"

"How long will that be?" asked Boyland.

Acker smiled thinly, said, "Tonight. One way or another, it will be over tonight."

"Why the rush?" Boyland asked as he closed the suitcases.

"That demonstration may have been staged," Acker explained. "Real or no, Povering can hang a protective custody arrest on me. I can't risk getting thrown to the wolves."

Vicki Grayson said, "Cantlon pays Povering graft. I can't prove it, but it's true."

"Check," said Acker. "Let's blow!"

The blonde opened the door and stepped into the hallway. She signalled the all clear. Boyland staggered out with the suitcases. Acker joined Vicki Grayson, eased the door closed. They heard the salesman let himself into his room and lock the door.

"I'll take the rear stairs into the alley," Acker said.

She grabbed his upper arms. Her long fingers were vise-like.

"I just remembered something," she said, alarm in her voice.

"What?"

"Boyland. His face was familiar. It just came to me. He was there in the park five years ago."

"Sure? Positive?"

"Yes. Yes. I don't remember the details. But he was there. I'd stake my life on it."

Downstairs the street door banged open.

"Oh," moaned the clerk. "I'm so glad to see you, Chief."

Acker leaned forward impulsively and kissed Vicki Grayson on the cheek. Then he spun on his heel and ran noiselessly to the rear stairs.

The alley was deserted, and very dim. Acker ducked under the eaves of a building. Rain fell in torrents, cut little channels in the gravel alley.

Acker closed his eyes. Vicki Grayson had smelled delicious when he'd kissed her—fresh and clean, like a bar of new soap. The kiss was for favors received. After all, he didn't dare voice his thanks with Povering downstairs.

Acker snapped out of it. What a fool to stand there like a lovesick kid! Povering would eventually check the rear exit. He started for the street, hugging close to building walls where the shadows were deepest.

The rain was doubly blessed. It had broken up the mob of women. Now it had driven everyone indoors and he could slip away unseen.

A rectangle of light gleamed from an open doorway ahead. The rear of The Silver Dollar! Acker had the crazy impulse to go into the tavern and confront Steve Cantlon. Like the curly haired hero of a "B" western, he wryly reflected. Only Cantlon wouldn't use a knife with a rubber blade.

A gaunt figure looked in the lighted doorway. Then Jessop stepped out, looked up and down the alley. Acker had sidestepped behind a telephone pole.

"Jessop!" he called softly.

The drunk stiffened, almost cried out in alarm.

"Who's it?" he replied, his voice crackling from nervousness.

"Acker. Meet me in that empty garage!"

There was only one empty garage nearby. Jessop looked up and down the alley again, weaved his way into the garage. Acker followed. Jessop had fished out a cigar butt.

"Put it away, you fool!" Acker snapped.

Jessop threw the butt out into the alley as if it were a bomb ready to explode. The old soak's nerves were raw. He had the shakes.

"Talk!" Acker ordered.

Jessop wiped his nose on his dirty coat sleeve.

"I ain't well," he whined. "Need money for medicine."

Acker took out a hundred dollar bill, tilted it so gray light fell across the face of it. Jessop snatched at it. Acker yanked the bill away.

"What you've got to tell better be right," he said.

"It's the gospel truth," Jessop protested.

"What is?"

"Cantlon an' Povering was at your place that night."

Acker's heart began to hammer.

"How do you know?"

"I was in the back a Cantlon's car. I sneaked in it to steal whiskey. Cantlon an' Povering come out of the bar an' got in front. I duck down. We drove a spell, then stopped. Them two got out. I peeked out. It was your place. It was dark. I was scart to get out. Povering might see me and shoot. They come back an' drove to The Silver Dollar."

"Did you hear a shot?" asked Acker, trying to make his voice low and soothing. The drunk excited easy.

Jessop shrugged, said, "I'm a little deaf."

"What time was it?"

JESSOP shrugged again. He seldom knew the day of week, except Sundays when the bars were closed.

"How do you know it was the night my wife was killed?"

"I fell asleep in the car. Cantlon found me when he come for his tow rope to hang you with. That ain't all I know."

"What else?"

"I seen Povering an' Cantlon out at your place lots a times."

"After it was burned?"

"Yeah. They was pokin' amongst them ruins."

Acker handed Jessop the bank note. The



old sot folded it with shaking fingers, stuffed it into his watch pocket.

The shock of possessing riches beyond his reckoning was too much for Jessop's frayed nerves. His eyes rolled up into his head and his knees collapsed. Acker caught him under the arms, laid him out on the floor.

A vexing problem was neatly solved. Jessop was a blabbermouth. And Jessop with a hundred dollar bill would make sense to the astute Steve Cantlon. Acker had wondered what to do with the old soak. Maybe things were coming his way. Jessop began to snore.

Earl Acker left the alley with his brain spinning airily. The rain soaked him to the skin within a block. He didn't even notice.

Jessop was a notorious liar. But his story dovetailed with Vicki Grayson's comments on the Cantlon-to-Povering graft pay-offs. And Jessop had been jugged many times for filching liquor from parked cars.

Far ahead hill tops were hidden by the black bellies of low hanging clouds. It was very dim, and the houses he passed were lighted against the unnatural gloom.

Acker stopped, became aware of his surroundings. He'd been walking fast without conscious direction. His subconscious mind had taken over and exerted a homing instinct.

A half a block ahead stood the fire-gutted service station.

Acker took off at a brisk walk. So his prime suspects had searched the ruins, if Jessop was to be believed. Why? There was only one answer to that. For evidence the state police had overlooked.

Earl Acker crossed the coast-to-coast highway and circled the ruins. It was a depressing sight. He lit a cigarette with fumbling fingers, took two drags, threw it away. Here was the monument to his high hopes! His eyes misted. Years and years of self denial to save money to own his business. There had been no insurance. The rates were sky high for the location and nature of the enterprise.

Only the twelve foot square concrete block building that contained the office and toilets remained. The frame dwelling Acker had built in rear was a dismal mound of blackness and the damp air bore the stench of charred wood. The oil company had long since removed its pumps and other equipment.

Big raindrops pelted down with a sudden fury. Acker made a dash for the building, entered, closed the door. All he could see was the white smudge of a toilet bowl. The panes of the transom-like windows had heat-shattered and fallen to the floor to break into thousands of glassy slivers.

Acker's army training automatically asserted itself and he closed his eyes a full thirty seconds to adjust his vision to the gloom.

He opened his eyes.

Steve Cantlon stood in a corner across from him!

The dapper little Corsican's eyes were fire. Acker could hear labored, gusty breathing—as if Cantlon had been holding his breath. The Corsican's bared teeth looked like a tooth paste advertisement.

Neither spoke. Cantlon held the knife in his right hand with his thumb pressing the blade guard. He'd mastered the knife as a boy in Corsica.

"Povering says you got evidence to put the finger on the men who tried to lynch you," Cantlon said, his voice controlled.

Acker didn't reply. Jumbled thoughts collided chaotically within his skull. He vaguely wondered why the chief had put that interpretation on the contents of the suitcase. Then he knew. In Povering's childish mind the fact that Acker had killed his wife was as simple as two and two make four. Therefore the photos of fingerprints had to do with the attempted lynching.

Cantlon said, "You followed me here and tried to kill me. Only I killed you. Very simple. Self defense."

"Why did you come here? The jury will want to know."

"I look it over," said Cantlon. "I want to buy, now that the owner is in town. I got lots of property."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### New Frame for an Old Picture

**F**ORKED lightning in the sky outside brought a split second of brilliance, then thunder echoed across the hills like the roll of giant kettle drums.

"I'm unarmed," Earl Acker said, sparring for time so he could think things out.

"There'll be a gun in your hand," Cantlon said.

Rippling yellowness danced in Acker's eyes. "So you killed her," he said. "That's what you did to me before—planted a gun in my hand."

The room filled with Cantlon's harsh laughter.

"You killed your wife," he raged. "You killed her. That's why I kill you."

Cantlon's obvious sincere belief drained the triumph from Acker's weary brain.

Steve Cantlon was through talking. He advanced a step. Earl Acker tensed. The promise of physical activity swept the cobwebs from his mind. Cantlon was a vengeful, hot-headed Corsican. But, like many explosive Latins, he calmed and steadied when the chips were down.

The litter of glass on the floor demanded caution. It checked Cantlon's movements to

a study in slow motion. The Corsican lifted his left arm, crooked it. The knife, pressed against his right hip bone, was well guarded.

Cantlon's slow, deliberate advance was partly designed to unnervise his opponent. Acker refused to panic. He shuffled his feet to assure good footing, rose on tiptoes. Open hands hung limply by his thighs.

"I don't scare easy," he taunted Cantlon. "I've been to war. Killed a Jap with my bare hands in a hut this size. Broke his dirty neck."

The Corsican stopped. His face was deadpan, but his black eyes registered a flicker of worry. Cantlon was accustomed to see his victims go flabby with terror.

Black eyes glittered. After all, he was an artist with the knife. A man of great skill, even by the rigid standards of his native land.

Thus reassured, Cantlon resumed his slow advance. Acker pressed the palms of his hands to his stomach. The act seemed to puzzle Cantlon. His forehead knit in a frown of concentration.

Cantlon's brain diagramed the attack. A quick rush, a stab beneath his crooked arm at Acker's belly. Acker would grab frantically for the knife arm. Cantlon would then whip the knife over his crooked arm and slash at the throat.

Cantlon rushed. His eyes dropped to Acker's hands. They were the things to watch. The timing had to be right.

Acker's hands didn't move. But his right foot did. He kicked out and up with the savage speed and power of a football punter.

The toe of his shoe caught Cantlon's left knee cap. There was a gritty crunch. The Corsican screamed like a woman. His entire body jerked with exquisite pain. The knife fell on the glass with a musical twinkle. Cantlon's face gushed sweat, grayed with agony.

Cantlon hopped backward on his good leg. Desperation gave him agility. He hopped back against the far wall, leaned there sobbing.

The door burst open! Acker had to duck sideways to escape the edge of it.

Povering came in amazingly fast. The .45 was in his fist, the hammer cocked. He sidestepped a safe distance from Acker, covered him with the big automatic.

"Shoot!" the Corsican screeched. "He's got a gun."

"You know I haven't," Acker snapped. He'd fought for his life, now he'd have to talk for it.

"Sure," he raged. "Kill me! You'll be under Cantlon's thumb the rest of your life. Cops can be murderers too."

Povering licked his lips. His eye darted from Acker to Cantlon, back to Acker again. The muzzle of the .45 trembled.

"But you killed your wife," said Povering, as if that would justify his murder.

"The state doesn't think so," Acker said. "The jury didn't think so. How about the state troopers? They cleared me. How'd you like to have the state troopers bear down on you?"

The state troopers were a smart, tough bunch, and Povering wanted no part of them.

"You're in protective arrest," he told Acker. "I'm puttin' you on the six-ten train."

They looked at Steve Cantlon to see how he took it.

The Corsican was staring up at the high-set windows. His eyes were wide and disbelieving. His lips worked, but not a sound came from his throat.

Earl Acker snapped his head around.

A blue-black revolver was held through the window by a gloved hand!

The trembling muzzle of it aimed at Acker's heart.

The revolver blasted a jet of flame, a billow of blue smoke. It kicked up and back against the gloved hand, vanished magically. The room quivered from the sharp thunder of the report, deafened them.

**E**ARL ACKER'S left side felt as if it had been hit by a pile-driver. He glanced down at it and saw a little dust cloud span out from the coat. Came the absurd thought that he'd forgotten to get his suit dry cleaned. Cordite fumes stung his nostrils. He saw severed thread ends where the bullet had torn through the fabric.

Acker sucked air into his deflated lungs.

Agony stabbed his chest in a million white-hot needles.

Falling, he heard a voice from the window. It was Bill Boyland's.

A bright light exploded in Acker's brain. Then black shadows smothered it.

The hospital room was unusual. The walls were blue, the ceiling a yellow tint called sunburst, and indirect fluorescent lighting diffused a soft radiance.

The young doctor wore a short-sleeved tunic that laced up the back. Admiration danced in his eyes.

"You sure have guts," he told Acker.

"I doubt it. I feel as empty as a balloon."

"I taped your chest with adhesive. A .45 packs power, even if you did wear a bullet-proof vest. You've got a few cracked ribs. Man and boy, you've got guts. What if he'd aimed at your head."

"He shot my wife through the heart. I gambled on a repeat performance. It was a good bet."

Vicki Grayson walked up to the bed. Her gray-green eyes were starry.

"And you won," she said, her voice vibrant.

Acker saw that he was stripped to the waist and adhesive tape wound his chest like

armature wiring. The doctor helped him into his shirt, left the room with a smirk.

"I feel as if I'd walked into sunlight."

Vicki Grayson nodded, said, "You look years younger. Well, I ruined a pair of nylons. But I got a story that the news service snapped up and cried for more."

"As they say in the books, I was numb with astonishment when the revolver appeared in the window. The hero was in a room with the prize suspects. And it was the little man who wasn't there."

"Did you suspect Jessop at all?"

"No damn it! I was a trifle leary of meeting him after dark. But I was afraid he'd tip off Cantlon. Jessop planned to kill me when we met, didn't he?"

"Yes. He told me the whole gory story. He killed your wife. He was frightened when you got off the train. He was terrified when Povering blabbed about the suitcase."

"Whoa! This is crazy. Jessop had no motive to kill my wife."

"Ah, but he did. An overwhelming motive. But that comes later. Jessop planned to kill you when you met tonight. But it was a last resort. He hoped Cantlon, Povering, or Valley View would do you in before that. Then he ran into you in the alley."

"That was just dumb luck."

"Oh, no. It was Jessop who made those women howl. The rain sent him into The Silver Dollar. It came to him that you'd be scared out of the hotel. It'd give him a chance to sneak into your room and steal those fingerprint pictures. That's how you came to run into him. By the way, did the stuff in the suitcase mean anything?"

Acker grinned, admitted, "Nothing. They were training aids the state police school uses. Povering had to ball up the impression I wanted to give."

"But Jessop didn't. He knew you were after your wife's killer. Well, in the alley he tried to sharpen your suspicions of Cantlon and Povering. Actually they weren't near your place that night. Then Jessop hinted about evidence at the gas station. He pulled a phony faint on you. After you went he tipped off Cantlon, then phoned Povering."

"Did he have the gun then?"

"Yes. But he didn't dare use it. Everybody in the bar had seen him go out back. Jessop saw Cantlon leave. Then he ran all the way to the gas station. He got there just as you went in. Povering arrived about that time. Povering stood outside the door listening. When the chief went in, Jessop ran over and climbed up to the window thinking the coast was clear."

"Wasn't it?"

"No. Bill Boyland had just driven up. I was right behind him. You see, Boyland was my suspect. I was trailing him. And a lousy job I did."

"I should have told you everything about Boyland."

"He told me. He came back to my car and explained that he was a state police officer and that you two had cooked up a plan to trap your wife's killer."

"We'd planned it for night. I was to walk around town and eventually walk out to the gas station. Those women threw all our plans out the window. Boyland actually took over a coffee route and put on an act here."

## MASTER of the BLACK TOWER

That doomed tower of El Diablo was built of sheer hate. From the rattlings of the mail-clad skeletons, and the screams of the half-human beast in the cellar, to the weird, supersonic stinging death in the crown of the ancient structure was a world of high whining madness, which I wish to God I had never seen. . . ! Don't miss—

### The Tower of Stinging Death

By R. Sprague Hall



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HE DID a sweet job of impersonating a salesman. Well, we started for the station just as Jessop climbed up to the window. Boyland shot a second after Jessop fired at you. Caught him through the thigh. Jessop has been taken to Pittstown. Boyland's with him."

"You talked to Jessop first?"

"You bet."

"Why did he kill my wife?"

"For three thousand five hundred dollars. It was graft. Povering wanted graft in advance so he could buy a house. Cantlon gave it to your wife. Povering was to trail her in his police car and make her pull up at the city limits as if it were an arrest for traffic violation. Jessop overheard the plan. He stole the rotor out of the police car distributor."

"I saw Jessop hanging around the police station when I was waiting for the bus to arrive," Acker admitted, just remembering, "Say I actually talked to him—told him why I was meeting the bus."

"Jessop reasoned that your wife would go home if Povering didn't stop her as planned. He went to your place and broke in. He had a club, that was all. Then he saw that your wife might come in any of three ways. He remembered your gun."

"I showed it to him once," Acker admitted.

"Well, Jessop masked his face with a handkerchief and hid in the bathroom. Your wife came in. Jessop said she was there quite awhile before he had nerve enough to leave the bathroom."

"She recognized that filthy green suit he's worn for years."

"Yes. He shot her. He turned out the lights and waited for you. He had searched your wife's pockets and purse. He wanted that money. He said he'd planned to kill you. Then it occurred to him that he could frame you for murder. He did just that."

"I suppose he turned on the lights after he knocked me out so he could find the lost dough."

"Yes. He wiped the gun and put it in your hand. The lights attracted the tourists. Jessop hid out back. He was there all the next day while the troopers searched for clues. At dusk a car drove in and somebody threw a can through the window. Jessop had to stand there and watch your place burn up with the money."

Acker said, "My God! No wonder Cantlon and Povering hate my guts. They think I did it for the money."

"Of course. They didn't dare tell anyone. Povering would be out of a job and Cantlon would have to close his gambling."

They were both silent a moment.

"That's that," said Acker. "Now I can go away and start all over again."

"Why go away? Why not here?"

"Valley View and I are all washed up," he said bitterly.

Vicki Grayson opened her purse. She handed him the money he'd given her for safe keeping. Then she gave him a manila envelope. It was stuffed with bank notes.

"Four thousand dollars," she said. "From the person who burned your gas station down."

"Cantlon," Acker said.

"Is home with a broken knee cap," she explained, twisting his implication into another channel. "Povering will avoid you for weeks. He's too ashamed to face you. He has that sort of a child-mind. You know that."

"For five years this town hated my guts. Three thousand. . ."

"False prophets," she interrupted. Suddenly her cheeks burned with anger. "You stupid, pig-headed fool! Do I have to draw pictures?"

Her fury startled him, swept his own anger away.

"Draw pictures," he said in a meek voice.

"Valley View never hated you," she explained. "They hated a wife-killer the same as New York or Chicago or Podunk. They were confused. They thought you the wife-killer. They were wrong. Now they're sorry."

"You belong here. You've got courage. It took guts to come back. That's the stuff these tough guys like. They'll be telling it to their grandchildren. It'll be part and parcel of Valley View."

"The walking legend," said Acker.

"If you promise to stay," she told him, "I'll tell you a secret that's puzzled the town a long time."

Earl Acker opened his mouth to reply. Just then a band right outside the building blared out a brassy chord that rattled window panes a block away.

"What's that?" Acker cried.

"The whole town calling. They've closed the stores and locked up the movies. You can hardly walk through the park for the beer kegs and whiskey cases. The women have made enough sandwiches and things to feed an army."

Vicki Grayson began to cry. Acker put his arms around her and held her close. She pressed her face against his chest. The cracked ribs didn't hurt even a little bit.

"I'll stay," he told her in a choked voice.

"I'll stay. What's this deep, dark secret?"

Her muffled voice just reached him above the din of the band.

"I was the one who called the troopers five years ago."

Earl Acker felt like crying too. He was home. Great God Almighty, he was home!

By **DANIEL GORDON**



Jimmy let his weight go slowly, relentlessly, to the same side—it was easy.

## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

*It all happened under water: The first time down, Jimmy beat a murder rap; the second time he forgot a safe combination, and the fatal third was one for the book—because old Jimmy never came up again.*

**D**OC ZIMMERMAN'S head came in and Doc said: "Make it ten, Jimmy." Jimmy, springing to the pump, said "Yessir." He watched the hand creep slowly around the face of the dial, listened to the little bell tick off the gallons. He grinned at the Doctor.

"Windshield's mighty dusty," Jimmy said. "Lemme burnish it."

"Some other time, Jimmy. I'm on a call." Doc Zimmerman tortured his car into low gear, sliced off thirty cents worth of rubber letting out the clutch. "Make the old man take it easy," he yelled.

Like an ant swinging on a string, Oley Zerkey's ancient open job crept down the road from the heights above the lake. Jimmy watched the black beetle that was a big sedan swing around it, creeping down. The black beetle that had passed Zerkey's car on the mountain was stopping.

"Fill it, Kid."

"Pinch bottle or Courvoiser?" Jimmy said meekly.

The driver of the black job flipped the lid up on his hat and looked out the window.

"Jimmy. . ."

"Hello, Al."

"Watcha doin' here?"

"What do you usually do in a filling station?" Jimmy asked, looking at the ones he didn't know, sprawled in the back seat.

One said: "Hell, Al. . ."

"Sure," Jimmy said. "This chariot's hot—where you going?"

The hairy one in the back seat shoved out his jaw, sat up. "Bright eyes. . ."

"Always. . ." The driver, called Al, paused.

"Come along?"

"Not tonight," Jimmy said. "I gotta frail—husband owns the Rock Island." He dropped his eyes, moved his hands curvaceously, then thought of Ruthie and gave a short description of her. "Roll, Al," he said. "My boss is comin' down the mountain and he's a deputy; might know this job."

"Sure no ride? I'll cut you fourths and it's like rentin' rooms."

"I'm down here for my health."

"Okay, sweetheart." Al threw the car into gear. His hairy companion in the back seat sat straight up.

Jimmy looked into the back seat. "Keep his muzzle snug," he said. He looked at the back of the big car sliding away; looked at the bill in his hand that Al had handed him. "Chumpo," he said aloud. "Muscle-bound in the head to have that ape along."

He looked at Ruthie, again in the door, and held up the bill. "It's all in knowin' the right people," he said to her.

Oley Zerkey eased his weight out of the car and stood mopping his pink brow. "Always busy," he said approvingly. "Never did I see such a boy!"

Jimmy smiled upon him. "Makes the time pass, Mister Zerkey."

OLEY waddled into the lunchroom. Pausing, he clapped Jimmy on the shoulder. "Like a son to me," he said. "With somebody else I'd be afraid to leave the place. Such bums

you could get! Either they talk back to my customers or get drunk and burn down the place. But you—" Oley looked at him fondly.

Jimmy didn't like the fat hand on his shoulder but he didn't squirm. "It's mutual," he said, "I mean—you're like a father to me, Mister Zerkey." He let his gaze drift far out over the lake, "He died when I was very small, you know. . ."

Oley patted him again, consolingly, moved away to putter around in the rear of the store.

Snapping the locks on the pumps, Jimmy turned his mind to the night ahead and found it bleak. He went into the lunchroom and said: "Gimme a beer."

"Beer? You drinkin' beer now?" Ruthie looked tired.

"A hunnert a month ain't champagne money," he told her morosely. "Cut the yappin' and bring the beer."

She brought it. "Thought Mr. Zerkey was going to give you a raise," she said.

"I'm a son. Got adopted today. Cheaper for Oley that way."

"Well, why do you stand for it? A smart fellow like you could do lots better in the city; especially with your energy," Ruthie added sarcastically.

The beer and the beef with Ruthie were making him feel better. "I'm restin'," he said. "You sure are. Twenty-four hours a day. But I'd give a pair of nylons to know what you're doin' here. The guys in the car this afternoon—that's your type."

"It's you, baby. Me and the boys. We can't resist you. Why I had an invitation to go on a party tonight—" Jimmy stopped. Some party. If that ape in back was as trigger happy as he looked, bullets would fit like butterflies on a June day. "Turned it down," he went on. "Told them I had a date with you."

"You—" Ruthie's eyes were level. She didn't smile.

"Well? Have I?" He kept the grin on through her long silence.

Then, very quietly, she said: "Okay, Jimmy, I'll be off in half an hour."

He took her for a walk, down near the big hotel at the end of the lake. He didn't have any dough so they didn't go in. Tomorrow he'd tap Oley for a twenty-five dollar advance. He'd have to. One more night of just walking and talking with Ruthie would make him slip a cog. Every five minutes she'd come out with the same crack. Honest, she'd say, my feet are killing me . . . over and over again until he felt like slapping her down. When Jimmy kissed her goodnight he did it mechanically. She was a nice armful but he was tired of hearing her gripe.

Oley grunted and strained to see the com-



bination on the venerable safe. Like a magician about to pull a horse out of a hat, Jimmy thought. The door squeaked and swung open, and, blinking only once at the size of the roll before Oley turned, Jimmy discreetly averted his eyes from the combination.

"Here," said Oley.

Jimmy took the twenty-five. "Thank you, Mister Zerkey."

Oley patted his arm. "Don't mention it," he said. "Like a son, that's you, Jimmy."

The smile on Jimmy's face didn't go all the way to the eyes. *That roll! Who'd 'a' thought the fat old hick had that much in the kitty?* Watching Oley waddle away, Jimmy marveled and swore. *How lucky d'ya think he is? A chumpo like that ape Al was carrying would split the old man's conk for a wad half that size.* It had to be smooth and it had to be smart. He had the combination; he was that much ahead. And an angle would occur to a smart lad who took his time.

He knelt thoughtfully, and absently fingered the gravel in front of the pumps. He didn't hear the car pull in.

George Atkins was a timid little man who worked in a law office in town. Seeing Jimmy kneeling in the gravel, he said: "what are you doing, Jimmy?"

Jimmy opened his hand and let the pebbles drop. "Sounding tanks," he said. The sneak. The little crawling sneak. If anybody else drove that heap you could hear it coming for ten miles. With sneaky Atkins at the wheel, the wreck had crept right up on him. "What'll you have, George?" Jimmy asked pleasantly.

"Five straight," George said.

Jimmy nodded and removed the rusty cap. "Oley must think a lot of you."

"We get along," Jimmy said carefully.

**G**EORGE paid him and drove away. Jimmy rang up the sale and resumed his thoughts. That funny crack George made about Oley's thinking a lot of him. There was an angle there. You had a guy working for you, and one night you went to bed and when you woke up the guy was gone and your roll was gone. Then what? You call the cops; you scream like hell. *But suppose you liked the guy?* Suppose—Hell, you wouldn't like him that much, not unless you owed him a lot, unless he'd done something like save your life. *But—saved your life!* There was, Jimmy told himself, always an angle. . . .

Just before quitting-time, Jimmy said: "You busy this evening, Mister Zerkey?"

"Never Busy," Oley said happily. "Why?"

"Well, ever since I been here, I been wanting to learn to fish.

"Never too busy to fish," Oley said. "I

would've ask you before only I think you don't like fishing."

"No kiddin'," Jimmy assured him, "I been wantin' to learn."

Oley took a long time collecting the gear. Jimmy waited at the landing, nerves a little jumpy. Out of practice, that was it. He'd wanted to ask Ruthie whether Oley could swim. It would be better if he couldn't swim at all, of course. More fear, more gratitude—the gratitude Jimmy was counting on to make Oley keep quiet about his missing dough.

"Let's take the canoe," Jimmy said. "Easier on the back."

They slipped over the smooth surface of the lake, Jimmy paddling, Oley weighting the bow. In the center of the lake, far from either shore, Jimmy laid down the paddle. Oley said, without turning his head: "Better we go in near the other short. Nothing out here."

Jimmy said: "Try it here, Oley. I got a hunch."

Oley felt cautiously for his rod, made a cast. Jimmy tried it. The line snarled and disgustedly he hauled it back. It lay in a wet tangle in the bottom of the canoe. Oley, gingerly twisting his head to watch his pupil, said playfully: "Neatness, Jimmy! What a mess you make."

Jimmy grinned with a grin that wasn't all there. Oley tried another cast. Jimmy let his weight go slowly, relentlessly to the same side. It was easy. She rolled slowly, then faster. He heard Oley say: *Jiii—* and then the canoe was upside down and he was under it.

Cold water. Damned cold. Cold, pale green and fairly clear. Clear enough so that he should be able to see Zerkey. And he had to see Zerkey, fast. His record wouldn't stand for guys drowning on canoe rides.

Then he saw Oley, saw his legs thrashing the water. The old man seemed to be trying to make the canoe. Jimmy Burroughs made a sweet underwater approach without pausing for breath, spun Oley around and shoved him to the surface. The old man struggled a little and spluttered some words, words jumbled by the splashing. He clamped Oley's thrashing arm against his side and struck out for the distant shoreline, using a cross-chest carry.

The distance was greater than he'd thought. Yet Oley was a model victim. He floated high in the water, his eyes closed, his breathing normal. "Hell," panted Jimmy, "he seems to be enjoying the ride!"

Some time passed before he knew he wasn't going to make it. Savagely, he put the thought from him and kicked the harder. He'd have to let go of Oley. But Oley wasn't such a bad guy. Okay. So he wasn't too bad a guy. But would you rather have him

drown or you? Him. But if he drowns you wind up in stir. Take it easy—easy hell, you're drowning, you chump! Exhausted, Jimmy Burroughs released his grasy on Oley. He felt his feet sinking, slowly, very slowly. But he couldn't help it, he really couldn't help it. . . .

Someone was pulling his hair. Through the pain in his lungs and the panic in his mind, he realized that someone was pulling his hair. His head came up then, came up and stayed up, supported by the hand he couldn't see. The water gurgled not unpleasantly in his ears and he realized that he was moving through the water at a very healthy rate.

He twisted until he could see the arm that belonged to the hand that gripped his hair. It was Oley's arm—nobody else had an arm that big. So Oley could swim. And noting the steady pace, Jimmy modified that discovery. Oley was one hell of a powerful swimmer. "You're pulling my hair," Jimmy said.

Oley laughed and shifted his hand to the point of Jimmy's chin. He kept the side-stroke going and roared cheerfully: "Good you're awake. For a while I think you'll need pumping out when we get home."

"I think I can make it now."

"Okay by me," said Oley. He let go.

Jimmy rolled over and swam weakly. His arms were heavy and his legs hurt. He said: "Oley, I—"

"**B**BETTER I give you free ride," Oley grunted as he hauled Jimmy to the surface.

Jimmy said nothing. There was nothing to say. It took them a long time to make the beach.

Jimmy, swinging his feet noiselessly to the floor the next morning, looked at Oley lying in the other bed and decided that the old man didn't look so well. Sympathy, now. Well, the old man had saved your life. And that wad of dough was still in the safe. Jimmy swore silently and with fury as he headed for the lunchroom.

Ruthie brought the coffee without being asked. She said: "Gosh, Jimmy, I thought I'd die when they told me."

He said: "Oley's one hell of a swimmer." *She looks good when she's not wisecrackin'; she looks plenty good.* Jimmy chopped the thought. All he needed to top his present spot was a strong yen for this baby.

She was still looking at him with that wondering look. She said: "Oley oughta be good. He swam across the lake and back every morning of his life till Doc Zimmerman made him quit it. It's his heart."

"Bum ticker?"

"Yeah. But Doc says he'll be okay as long as he takes it easy."

Jimmy got up. "Goin' outside," he said. "I'll see if I can scare up a stray truck driver for you while I'm out there."

Ruthie came around the counter, put her hand on his arm. She looked up at him and said: "Jimmy, I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

He hesitated, then roughly turned and shouldered the screen door. The air from the mountains was good, cool and bracing, but Jimmy didn't notice it. He could see the future like you'd look in a crystal ball—like it was shown on a movie screen. Old Oley with a tricky heart, a ticker that wouldn't track; old Oley had risked his life to tow you ashore. You owed the guy something for that. You ought to stick around. But sticking around meant you'd someday be a partner in the lousy little business, maybe someday even inherit the joint. Also there was Ruthie. She made time when she was serious, and she'd looked mighty serious last night. . . .

Ruthie had fried the eggs the way he liked them. She said: "Three men robbed the bank at Ravenwood last night. It came over the radio just now."

"Yeah?" Jimmy said casually. Then, "Hurt anybody?"

Ruthie nodded. "They killed a watchman."

Jimmy carried his coffee to the door. If they were headed this way they'd need gas. Killed the watchman, that ape in the back seat. "Dopes," he said.

Ruthie said: "What?" But he didn't answer. He put down the coffee and ran outside as the car skidded up to the pumps.

He had the cap off and the nozzle in the tank before the car sopped bouncing.

Al's face was haggard and his eyes were sunken from worry and lack of sleep. The hairy lad in the back seat was quiet this morning, Al said: "Thanks for the service, kid. Anything I can do for you in town?"

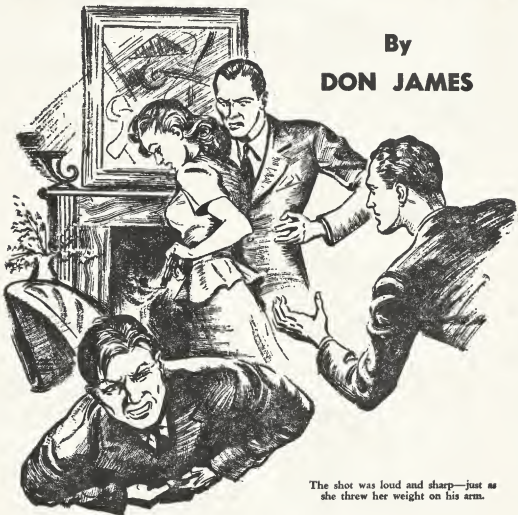
Jimmy hesitated, while Al gunned the motor. He looked at Ruthie standing in the door of the lunchroom. "Yeah," he said, "send out a guy to measure this joint for some neon signs."

Al looked at him curiously. "Can do," he said. The car leapt forward.

Jimmy watched as it fled, conscious of Ruthie still in the doorway. He hoped Al would have time to phone about the signs before they picked him up. "When you're stuck with a legitimate racket," he mumbled defensively, "the only thing to do is try to make it pay off." Then, eyeing the bare-earth borders that hemmed the gravel drive, "I wish—I wish I'd had nerve enough to ask Al to send out some flower seed."

# MEDAL FOR MAYHEM

By  
DON JAMES



The shot was loud and sharp—just as she threw her weight on his arm.

SHE watched me pace the living room floor in our small suburban home, probably seeing the worry in my eyes and the thin, tight line of my lips.

Finally I stopped and sat across the room from her in the upholstered chair we'd bought on time payments.

"Vera, we can't run away any longer," I said.

Her eyes searched my face and I saw the straightness of her small nose, the slight up-cast at the corner of her eyes, the smooth sheath of light brown hair.

It was not worry that was in her eyes. It was fright and the fright had become part of

*The future of the young Bill Brays looked mighty dim to Bill, for the minute after he married Vera, he found that he was very close indeed to a cold slab in the morgue, or— even more likely—to becoming a lead-weighted feast for fish!*

her. She tried to smile, but her lips trembled and her fists were tightly clenched.

I said, "He's found us again. If it doesn't happen here, it will somewhere else. It's as certain to happen as tomorrow's weather. Let's stop kidding ourselves that it won't."

"We can leave," she said. "We can go to Seattle, San Francisco . . ."

I shook my head.

"I'm going to see Len Sash and settle it one way or the other."

"No! You can't, Bill! He'll . . ."

"There are plenty of things he might try, but I'll take my chances. I did it before and I can again."

She stood and walked to me. Tears glistened in her eyes.

"I'm not worth it," she said quietly. "Why don't you bow out? It's all right. I'd understand."

I reached for her and drew her into my lap. Her head pressed on my shoulder as I held her closely.

"Sash still wants you," I said. "If he didn't, our running away wouldn't have made any difference. You were his girl and he wants you back. Remember New Orleans and Miami? He followed us and we got out in time. Now here. He must want you a hell of a lot."

"And as much as he wants you, I want you more," I said. "You're mine. You're Mrs. William Bray. I like what I've got and I don't want it different. Except that we can't live this way. We have to stop running."

\* \* \*

I remembered the first time I saw her. It was my second week with Len Sash and I was still trying to get my feet on the ground. Returning to civilian life was not too easy.

Little Petro Carneti told me about Sash one night on Saipan.

"You get back, Bill, and you look up Len. Tell him I sent you. He'll give you a job."

"I'm an accountant. What would a racketeer want with me?"

Petro shook his head impatiently. "The rackets are like business now. You got to have guys who can make with the pencil. You keep track of things. So you can look up Len Sash and tell him Petro Carneti sent you."

Home again, I called on Len Sash, but for another reason.

Somehow I had expected to find Sash in a night club office, or in the backroom of a bar, but he had a suite of offices in a business building. The lettering on the entrance door read "Acme Enterprises" and I had to convince an efficient secretary that I had good reason to see her employer.

Sash looked more like a movie-type executive than a racketeer. He even had a touch of

grey at his temples. He was tall, goodlooking and very suave. He stood to shake hands.

"Petro mentioned you in one of his few letters," he smiled. "I'm glad to meet you."

"I told Petro I'd stop in to see you," I explained.

From a pocket I pulled out a small package and handed it to Sash.

"You know, of course, that Petro was killed on Saipan," I said. "I was with him. He asked me to give you this and to say 'so-long'."

Sash took the package and carefully unwrapped it. For a long moment he looked at the St. Christopher's medal that once Petro Carneti had carried. He pocketed it and smiled a little sadly.

"He was a funny little guy," he said. "I liked him. Thanks."

He went to a liquor cabinet and poured drinks. Thoughtfully he stared out a window. When he turned he was smiling again.

**P**ETRO said you're an accountant. That possibly I might find a place for you when you returned. Are you working?"

"Not yet. I'm just taking it easy."

"There's a job here for you."

I shook my head doubtfully. "I'm not sure."

He laughed a little and his voice was pleasant. "Because I'm supposed to be in the rackets?" he asked.

I grinned. "Maybe."

He nodded and his grey eyes were friendly. "Actually most of my business is legitimate," he said. "At least, within the law—or with the law's permission here and there."

"Petro and I were pretty close out there," I said. "We talked a lot about things."

He studied the bottom of his empty glass and then spoke again. "All right. Let's put it this way. You work here strictly on the legitimate side of things. There's more than enough to keep you busy. The other stuff Petro talked about is something else and I won't expect you to become involved. I'll start you at a hundred a week."

"Look, Mr. Sash," I said. "You don't know a thing about me."

"You know accounting, don't you?"

"I have a university degree, but that isn't what I mean. All you know is that—"

"Petro said you're okay. That's good enough for me. You'll be at work in the morning?"

The hundred dollars a week looked big. Anyhow, what could I lose? If I didn't like it, I could get out.

"Okay. I'll start in the morning."

We shook hands again. He had a solid handshake. Petro had told me that Sash once killed a man in self defense. I thought that a man with a solid grip like that could handle a gun. It was in the coolness of his grey eyes.

In the next couple of weeks I learned quite

a bit about Sash's enterprises. I learned about the take on pinball machines, slot machines, punchboards. I learned how much a nightclub earns and where the overhead is. I also learned about dog racing, beer points, concessions.

There were other things, too. Things that by agreement were no part of my work. But I couldn't help overhearing and getting quick glimpses into another side of Sash's business.

Then one night he asked me to his apartment to go over some income tax returns and I met Vera.

I knew there was a girl somewhere in the background. She'd call sometimes when I was with Sash in his office. He thought a lot of her. It was in the way he talked to her, and once or twice I saw bills for the stuff he bought her.

The yearly rent he paid for his apartment would have bought a home for an average family. It was strictly from luxury, as Petro would have said.

He opened the door and took me in. He was wearing evening clothes and from the way he was talking you could tell that he felt good. When I saw Vera I knew why.

She was sitting in a white leather chair and she wore an evening gown that didn't let you forget for a second that she was a woman—and a beautiful woman. She was sipping a cocktail. She put it down and smiled expectantly as Sash brought me forward with a careless arm across my shoulders.

"Vera, this is Bill Bray, the new accountant I told you about."

He turned to me and said, "Bill, this is Miss Ivars."

Somehow I was suddenly glad to hear that "Miss."

She looked me over carefully, yet not impertinently. Her eyes twinkled and her smile was friendly when she spoke.

"Mr. Bray, you completely disillusion me. I thought all accountants were small, thin and pale. You're tall, broad and you have a sun tan that most girls would suffer torture to get!"

I must have blushed because Sash laughed.

"The tan comes from the South Seas," he said. "And stop embarrassing him."

We had a cocktail and then quickly went over the returns. They were going nightclubbing, Sash explained. While we worked Vera watched us quietly, her eyes showing intelligent interest.

Finally we finished and I stood up to leave. Sash urged me to join them for the evening, but I shook my head and glanced down at my business suit.

"I'll take a raincheck, if you don't mind."

Saying goodbye, Vera held out her hand. It was warm and soft and abruptly something

happened to me. For just a second her eyes wavered as we said goodnight and instinctively my fingers pressed hers. The pressure was returned, yet I knew that it was as impulsive with her as it had been with me.

I was still thinking about her when I turned out the light in my room and tried to go to sleep.

That started it, and two months later thinking about her took most of my time. The bad—or good—part was that she was thinking just as much about me.

Something else was happening. Sash was taking an interest in me. He was giving me more business to handle. Going out to his apartment became a frequent thing and sometimes there would be another girl and the four of us would make the clubs.

Those other girls were for me, but they didn't mean anything. We danced and drank, but I was waiting for that casual exchange of girls for a dance so that Vera would be in my arms.

Vera and I never talked about it. I think we were afraid. But sometimes on a crowded nightclub dance floor her fingers would clench into my arm as I drew her close. We talked and we laughed, but instinctively we knew that was for Sash to see. That was to make it look friendly and casual. But when you love a girl and the girl loves you, it's the touch between you, the way her body is yours for a moment on the dancefloor, the pressure of fingers and the hidden look in the eyes.

AND during all that time—and afterwards—knowing that she was Sash's girl was important in one way and unimportant in another.

It was important because of Sash. I'd been around him long enough by then to know that those grey eyes could be cold as murder; that men worked for him who never came to the office, but who "took care of things" with stark efficiency. I had seen him in anger and there was something deadly about it. It was unforgiving and intense. That part was important because being in love with his girl was like fondling a rattlesnake.

What was strangely unimportant was that she was his girl. That was something that happened before I came along. In Sash's business life he had plenty of contacts with the tawdry things, the unclean and the cheap. His personal life was something else. He wanted quality there. He bought the best. He wanted the best. And he appreciated the best.

I didn't know how it had started with Vera and Sash. I didn't know on what basis it existed. I might have made a guess, but I didn't even do that.

Those things happen and it was unimportant to me. Maybe it was just that the right man

hadn't come along for her. Maybe it was because she loved Sash a little, or liked him a lot. Maybe she wanted to live her life as she chose.

They must have had good moments together. Once or twice Vera told me about it later, and once she told me that he had wanted to marry her. She didn't tell me why she refused. I didn't ask.

In the meantime, all this was building up between us and it finally broke when Sash flew to Reno to look over a club someone wanted to sell. It was a fast trip and he didn't take Vera.

The thing that actually did it was almost too trivial to become so important in our lives. It was the St. Christopher's medal that Petro had sent him.

Sash didn't have many weaknesses, but there were a few. One of them was a streak of superstition. Shortly after I had given him the medal he got in a poker game and won twenty thousand. From then on the medal was his prize lucky piece. It wasn't the right use for the medal.

Before he left for Reno he had changed clothing hurriedly and had left the medal on a dressing table. The first day in Reno he called and asked if I'd send it to him. There was a big game the next night.

He was almost apologetic, but you could tell that he wanted that piece of metal in his pocket when he sat in the game.

"I don't want to bother Vera with sending it, so if you'll do it, I'll appreciate it, Bill."

After I hung up I began to think about going over there and a strange excitement got into me. My fingers trembled when I picked up the telephone and called her. She said she'd be in.

It was the first time we had ever been together alone. All of those things we'd never said were racing through my mind as I approached the apartment and the excitement made my mouth dry.

She opened the door and I tried to smile. She was wearing an afternoon frock that did everything right for her, and her own smile was a little forced. I followed her into the apartment and she stopped to put out a cigarette. Her fingers trembled.

"Drink?" she asked lightly.

"No. I'd better make this fast to catch the late plane."

"Did you say a medal?"

I told her what he wanted.

Her smile was a little more relaxed. She left the room and came back with it. Then we stood and looked at each other awkwardly. Her eyes were very steady and there was a clean smell from her hair.

"This is the first time we've been alone," she said quietly.

"Yes. I was thinking that, too."

All the looks we had exchanged in the weeks and months came into our eyes and were greater than before. It seemed that she swayed a little toward me and my arms felt her without touching her. I knew the feel of her against me without holding her.

She looked away and her lips trembled.

"You might kiss me," she said.

"If I do I'll ask you to marry me," I said. The excitement pounded through my pulses until I was tense with it.

She looked at me and this time my arms knew the feel of her. Her lips were soft and gentle and then became loose against my mouth with the hardness of the kiss. It was a long time. When I held her away her eyes were closed.

"I said I'd ask you to marry me, Vera. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Sash?"

"We can't help this."

"We're in love."

"We have been a long time, Bill."

"I've some money. We can get a train out this afternoon. We'll go to Miami. Maybe he'll understand. We'll be married before we leave."

"Bill . . . there are some things you should know about me."

"I'm only interested in the future."

"You'll never be sorry?"

She came to me again.

I mailed the medal from the railway station.

HE sent Pinky Shaeffer after me in Miami. That was the third week. I never knew how he found us, but he had contacts everywhere.

I'd found a job with a wholesaler and it was my second day. We had an apartment and as I hurried home I felt good. It was all right to have Vera waiting there for me. A new part of a new life.

Then Pinky Shaeffer stepped from a doorway and walked close to me so that I knew he had a gun clenched in his pocket.

"Hello, Bill," he said. "The boss wants me to take care of something for him."

Pinky was one of the operators in the side of Sash's business that had been out of my field. The short, broad man with the red hair was around the office frequently. I knew him. I knew that he collected certain "accounts" for Sash. The only collection technique he knew was his fists and the gun in his pocket.

I slowed down a little. "What's the pitch?"

"The sedan in the middle of the block. Get in it."



"A ride?"

"You can call it that."

There was a grim finality in his voice that left no doubt about what he meant. I needed a break and I needed it fast. It came.

Two cars smashed fenders at the next intersection and within seconds a crowd began to gather.

"I'm not getting in the car, Pinky," I said. "If you use that gun now, you'll never get away. That intersection is blocked by the wreck and people. You wouldn't have a chance."

He swore softly. At the car he stopped and I walked on, secure in the rapidly gathering crowd.

"You win this time," he said. "But you won't be the next."

I didn't answer. The main thing in life at the moment was to get to the apartment and learn if Vera was safe.

She was waiting for me. Pinky hadn't called on her.

We left that night for New Orleans and two weeks later a large sedan jumped a sidewalk, where I walked alone at night, and bore down on me. It happened fast, but somehow I got out of the way. The car speeded off, but not before I had a glimpse of the face behind the wheel. It was Pinky Shaeffer's face.

That time we picked Portland, Oregon, because it was almost as far away in the nation as we could get, and I knew that Sash had few if any contacts there.

For six months it was all right. There was a job with a ship repair yard and we bought a house in the suburbs. The nervousness was leaving us. I had almost come to the point where I didn't scan faces with expectant dread. Then I did see a face in a crowd waiting for busses. It was Pinky Shaeffer and he was watching me.

I took the first bus that stopped, waiting until the doors were almost ready to close. As we left the curb I had a quick glimpse of Pinky Shaeffer and then I saw the man standing next to him. It was Len Sash and he was smiling grimly as he watched the bus pull away from them.

I had taken the wrong bus to get away in a hurry and I left it several blocks later. Playing a hunch I went into a drug store and called one of the larger hotels. He was not registered there, but he was at the third hotel I tried.

Back on the sidewalk I caught my bus and went home.

That was when I decided that you can't run away.

It was very quiet in the living room. She was tense in my arms.

"We can't live this way," I repeated. "We have to stop running away."

She straightened up in my lap and looked at me, her eyes still filled with fright.

"But what can you do, Bill? What can you say to him?"

"I'm not sure. I just know that I have to face him."

"No, Bill. I know him better than you do. I know what he's capable of doing. You've already seen it yourself. Pinky Shaeffer at Miami and New Orleans."

"I don't get it," I said slowly. "Making you a widow wouldn't take you back to him. What does he want? What's he trying to do?"

"You crossed him, Bill. He hates you for that. He hates both of us for what we did to him, but mostly you."

I shook my head impatiently. "Vera! Men don't go around killing for revenge. Even Len Sash."

"Have you forgotten New Orleans and Miami?"

There was only one answer to that. She was right, but it didn't solve anything. Suddenly anger burned through me like acid.

"All right," I said. "If he wants to play rough, I'll play that way, too."

Vera got up and looked down at me.

"Don't go, Bill."

I stood and put on a coat and hat. She watched me quietly, but the tenseness was over her again. She didn't follow me into the bedroom where I got the .32 automatic I kept in a drawer.

The smile I gave her when I came out was tight.

"Don't worry about me," I told her. "I'll be back."

She stood in front of me.

"Don't go!"

I kissed her and went to the door. She stood in the center of the room watching me.

IT was a forty minute ride by bus to the business district. Vainly I tried to decide what I would do. You can't stop a man like Sash with threats. You can't ask him to be a good fellow. You can't expect him to understand some things.

The weight of the gun in my pocket frightened me. There was an answer in the cold steel and the lethal lead slugs it could spew.

I could use it, but I still would be running away from death. Not the death that Sash and Shaeffer might plan, but death in a small house at the state penitentiary. In Oregon they strap a convicted murderer in a chair and a pellet drops into acid in a container beneath the chair. Fumes rise. You hold your breath as long as you can. Then your lungs begin to burst and you have to breathe the fumes of death...

I shuddered as I thought of it. I could use the gun and never have to run from Sash

again, but then I'd have to run from the small house and the death chair.

Perspiration edged from beneath my hat band. The bus rambled jerkily over a long stretch of highway. Within moments I'd face Sash and when that time came I didn't know what I would do. But it had to come. This was the payoff for whatever it might be.

When I walked into the hotel lobby I walked stiffly, my muscles tense, nerves as tightly drawn as a high pitched note, yet within me there was a fluid trembling. Someone tapped my shoulder.

"Looking for someone?" Pinky Shaeffer asked quietly.

"Sash."

"He's not in, but I'll take you to him. He just left."

I nodded curtly and followed him from the hotel to a car parked on the next street. We got in and slid into traffic.

Neither of us spoke. Shaeffer's cold, green eyes held steadily to his driving.

We crossed the Broadway bridge and turned into Interstate, through town to cross Vancouver bridge into the state of Washington. He turned right at the end of the bridge and we were on the Evergreen highway going up the Columbia.

It was a twenty minute drive beside the broad river before he turned off into a driveway, circled down toward the river between trees, and stopped at a white, stucco house overlooking the water. A sedan was parked near it.

"This is it," he said.

He started to get out, but I put a hand on his arm. I had the automatic out.

"This is between Sash and me," I said. "Stay out of it."

He looked at the gun and shrugged.

"Don't try to use it," he said indifferently.

"Not on you unless you get tough. To make sure, I'll take yours."

He shrugged again as I took a gun from his pocket. We got out of the car. He led me into the stucco house and in the low, beamed living room two people watched us come in.

Len Sash stood beside a fireplace, and sitting in a low modernistic lounging chair was Vera.

Sash watched me with sardonic amusement. I could see him because he was in my line of vision as I stared at my wife.

Vera's eyes widened and she started to get up and then sat back again and looked at Sash.

"You said you'd leave him out of this until after we'd talked," she said bitterly. "I told you I wanted to talk with you before he saw you. That he was on his way to the hotel. You said we could come out here to your friend's house where we could talk alone."

Some of it began to unfold for me. Undoubtedly Vera had taken a taxi to town as

soon as I left the house. She had arrived at the hotel at least twenty minutes before I did. It had been a desperate effort to prevent me from seeing Sash and doing what I might do.

Sash continued to smile.

"We'll play it my way," he said.

Shaeffer crossed the room and leaned against a wall.

"He's got my gun, boss," he said quietly.

"We won't need guns."

"We shouldn't," I said. I took mine from a pocket and levelled it casually on Sash. "But we might. Now we'll talk."

"You came to me. Talk."

"It'll be brief," I said. "Just this. Leave us alone. You've sent Shaeffer after us twice. You've tried to have me killed twice. I'm getting tired of it."

"You talk big."

There was insolence in his voice and abruptly the whole thing folded for me. What was the use of threatening him? A dead man can't carry out a threat. I could warn him to leave us alone, but if he didn't I wouldn't be alive to do anything about it.

As long as Sash lived my own life was on borrowed time.

Desperation closed in on me and a strange feeling of justification was born. They already had tried to kill me twice and they would again. A man has a right to kill in self defense. I had a right to kill to save my own life and to protect Vera and me. I even had a duty.

Vera must have seen it in my eyes. She gasped and stood.

"Bill! No!" she turned suddenly to Sash. "Tell him you'll leave us alone. Tell him it's all right. I'll—I'll leave him—I'll do anything if you—"

"Stop it, Vera!" I snapped.

Sash continued to smile.

"If you have ideas about using that gun, forget them," he said. "Before I left the hotel I called the man who owns this place and told him who would be here. You can start shooting, but they'll know who did it. You'll still be running away."

**W**HY can't you leave us alone?" Vera cried. "What does it mean to you now? Our part is all over. Can't you ever understand that?"

For the first time the smile left his lips completely.

"I gave you both a break," he said thinly. "You took more than your share. Both of you, behind my back."

"So you intend to even things by killing me," I said.

"You know the answer," he bit his words like steel.

I started to walk toward him.

"All right," I said quietly. "There's only one answer. You'll call your friend—tell him everything is okay—that you're leaving in a hurry."

Vera's eyes became wide with fear. "Don't Bill! Please . . .!"

"If I have to kill to live, that's the way it is, Vera," I said.

A strange madness was over me. Maybe it was a basic urge for self-preservation. If Sash and Shaeffer were dead . . .

Vera sprang forward, not toward me, but toward Sash. She stood squarely in front of him.

"Listen to me, Bill," she whispered. "I won't let you. You don't know what you're doing."

Behind her Sash moved quickly and one arm pulled her back against him. His free hand swung up with a gun.

If there had been madness over me, it disappeared in a quick surge of realization of what had happened. Slowly I lowered my gun. If I had intended to shoot Len Sash, the intention was gone now. Vera formed a shield for him and his gun was centered bull's eye on me.

Sash spoke to Shaeffer. "Get his gun, Pinky. We'll take them for a boat ride. Later we'll say they drowned by accident. We'll be set."

I heard Shaeffer step behind me and saw his hand reach forward at my hip to take the gun. His breath was on the back of my neck, his other arm clamped around and under my chin. Sash's heavy .45 would slug through both of us. Sash would know that and I gambled that he didn't want to kill Shaeffer.

My head jerked back. Shaeffer swore in pain as his nose cracked.

There was only a second to do it. I had to drop the gun to seize the arm beneath my chin, straighten it, bend forward hard. Shaeffer went over my shoulder and crashed to the floor.

Vera screamed. I heard her scuffle with Sash.

I rolled with Shaeffer on the floor, fists driving. He reached for the gun I'd dropped. I dragged him away, holding him as a shield against Sash.

Sash spoke sharply. "Get back, Pinky. Roll free."

The man broke from me. I jerked at him. For a second I was alone in front of Sash. Vera clung to his gun arm.

The shot was loud and sharp just as she threw her weight on her arm.

Shaeffer jolted in my grasp and then was limp.

I reached for Sash's legs, caught, and pulled. He fell. I lunged to my knees and put my weight behind a fist. It cracked against his chin and he was quiet.

After a moment I got up and called the state police. Sash still was unconscious and the gun that had killed Pinky Shaeffer still was in his relaxed fingers when they arrived at the house.

Vera and I no longer have to run away. We've planted a garden in the back yard of our suburban home. I've just had a promotion on the job. Everything is right and up and coming with us.

Sometimes I think it was pure madness to seek Vera as I did. If Vera hadn't thrown herself in front of him at that mad moment I would have shot. It was her strength that deflected Sash's aim so that he got Shaeffer instead of me. She saved me from murder and from death.

She tries to make it easy for me about that. "You just lost your head, Bill. You'd never do it again."

But there is still fear in her eyes when she remembers.

I don't know what Sash thought about it afterwards. He didn't have a chance in court. They executed him for the murder of Pinky Shaeffer two months after he was convicted.

But there was something . . .

Two days before he died a package came to me. I opened it and stared a long time at what was inside.

It was Petro's St. Christopher's medal.

(Continued from page 37)



# DON'T LOOK NOW— IT'S MURDER!

*Thrilling Detective Novel*

**By W. T. BALLARD**



He caught the singer's arm before she knew he was there, and twisted it behind her until it seemed that the bone would break.

*"You'll get no thanks for it," said the Precinct Captain, "just play it down like it was an accident." And he banded Costa the kill-case that instantly set a hairless assassin on his trail, nearly cost him his badge, his life—and far more important than either one—his shiny custom-made convertible, a job specially built to repel bullets and attract blondes!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Lippy Larry Kill

A MAN already lay dead in the back room of a small restaurant, a girl was worried; her father brought pressure on the mayor, and a boy was listed as missing. All these things had happened in the last grey hours before dawn, but Costa wasn't thinking of any of them as he climbed the worn steps of the Thirty-fourth Street Precinct station. He was thinking of the car which he had just parked at the curb.

It was second hand, but new to him and though he'd owned many cars, none had given him this sense of pride. The car was blue, low and graceful, and its special body had once cost three thousand dollars.

Costa was a slim, dark man. His sport coat was expensive as were his chocolate slacks, but his hat was weather-stained and worn.

Applegate came through the swinging doors, saw the car, paused and picked his teeth with a frayed match stem. "Some car."

Costa did not trouble to answer. He went on into the building and on through the door marked "detective bureau."

The room smelled of stale tobacco and too many people. Frankl sat against the wall, his chair tilted, his heels hooked in the first round. He was asleep.

Costa stopped to stare at him. Frankl wasn't handsome at any time. Asleep, with his loose-lipped mouth slightly open, and a night's beard stubble clouding his flabby cheeks, he looked like a bum from the bull-pen.

Costa kicked him awake. "Go home," he said. "If the Captain saw you asleep you'd be up on charges."

Frankl's yellow eyes came open. He was a man, without hope, a precinct cop, stuck in this lousy sub-station, with no chance of advancement, no opportunity to move downtown.

He groaned, stretching his arms. "Why the hell does the city pay us? Nothing ever happens here. A drunk, a man kicking hell out of his wife, a lost dog, or kids breaking windows. Who cares." He rose and tried to straighten his sagging tie.

The tie was purple, with yellow flowers. It hit you in the eye. It looked cheap, as cheap as the store from which it had come. He yawned again and went vaguely through the door, leaving Costa alone with the odors of the room. The day had begun.

Then Chadwick came in. Chadwick was different from the rest. He was young and bright, a college man out of the M.P.s. . . . A police-school man, sent to the bushes for seasoning.

Chadwick was smart. He was going places for someone downtown had his eye upon him. Some day Chadwick might wear the scrambled eggs of an inspector's gold braid, he might be commissioner, or even chief, who knew.

The radio growled faintly from the far room, the siren of a squad car moaned out of the drive as it answered a hit-run call, the ambulance clanged up to emergency. Then the door opened and Porter stood in the entrance, looking pink and clean in his Captain's uniform.

**T**HE uniform was bright, but Porter wasn't going anywhere either. He was stuck at Thirty-fourth. Costa knew that, and Porter knew, and was apparently content.

He was a good man. He did his job. He quieted the neighborhood beefs, he saw that the right people were taken care of, and he didn't bother the boys downtown. He kept his woes here and muddled through, and in so doing, kept his humor and his ready smile.

He would go to his office now, check the lists, see that the board was clean, and then put his feet on the desk and read a Western. That routine was as old as his Captaincy.

But on this morning the routine broke.

Porter examined the room with china eyes, slowly considering. He looked speculatively at young Chadwick, then shrugged and moved his attention to Costa.

"Come into the office, Bert."

Costa did not show surprise. He followed the Captain and saw Porter carefully place his cap on its accustomed hook, and settle his well-cushioned bulk into the creaking desk chair. Nothing ever hurried the Captain, not even death.

"It's a nasty business," said Porter, "and one that will bring us no thanks. Larry the Lip got himself killed in the backroom of Trahone's Eatery at four-thirty this morning."

Costa did not speak. He had a fleeting mental vision of Larry's pasty face, and no feeling of loss to know that the man was dead. "Who cares?" was what he said.

The Captain groaned. "No one, that is, no one cares about Larry unless it's Tinkloe, and I'm not crying for him. The trouble is the murderer. The boy's father is the mayor's friend."

Costa still showed no surprise. "I should send Chadwick," Porter said, "but he lacks the experience, although he's very smart. This is to be handled with gloves. They don't want it downtown; they haven't called in homicide. It's in your lap, and your job is to make things as quiet and easy as you can."

"The mayor suggested an accident, but there are two witnesses. We'll try for manslaughter if the kid will cop a plea. The reason we're in it instead of homicide is that there hasn't been a reporter out this way for days."

Costa understood and was not angry. He'd been on the force too long. You came to expect such things, not that the department was crooked. There were crooked cops of course, as there were crooked druggists or undertakers, and in about the same percentage. Human nature did not change because you pinned a badge upon a man.

But there was special privilege. The mayor's friends were treated a little gently if possible. That part you would expect. You couldn't take the human relationship out of city government any more than you could remove it from the management of a department store.

"So what are the orders?"

Porter shrugged, and washed his hands in the air. "It's yours," he said. "You won't thank me, and no one will thank you. Just do the best you can, and play it down. The papers are bound to get it before the day is out. Take the attitude that the killing is of no importance, that if it were, homicide would be on it. You know how things work here. Theoretically the precinct gets a case and has forty-eight hours, as they do in Chicago. If



we haven't cracked it then, the downtown boys come in and grab the glory."

Costa took Chadwick with him. The boy was smart, but he was green. He had a lot to learn.

They used Costa's blue car. That in itself was contrary to regulations, but today, Costa didn't care. He knew well that he might be the goat for this days work, that if anything went sour, he'd be back in uniform, drawing a patrolman's pay. A detective sergeant wasn't much, but it was better than a harness bull.

The restaurant was small and dark and smelled of old food. Flies buzzed in the shaft of early morning sun which came through the window.

The body was gone, carried away by the coroner's men, and a uniformed patrolman was in charge.

This all was wrong, and Costa swore. If the precinct was to be in it, they should have had it first. But it hadn't worked that way. Trahone had called homicide. Homicide had come, looked things over, and gone away. There was no mystery. Young Gilcrist and Larry the Lip had come in together about three. They'd both been drinking and they were arguing. They'd refused the counter and insisted on being shown into the rear room. They were served, and the waitress went away. She was a big blonde and sullen about being held after her working hours. She told her story in short sentences, her big blue eyes daring Costa to cross-question her.

**I** CARRIED in the bacon and eggs," she said. "I dealt them around and this guy that gets croaked made a pass at my leg. I almost crowned him with the cream pitcher. I'm not that kind."

Costa grinned at the expression on young Chadwick's face. He said, "We know you're not. Give us the rest, and you can go."

She looked at Costa with new respect. He didn't seem like a cop with his smart sport coat, and his black curly hair and olive skin. A handsome guy, she thought, and wondered if he ever made passes at big blondes.

"There's not much to tell," she said. "I left them there, crying on each others shoulders like most any drunks will. I went up to the cash box where Trahone was counting the night's take, and then the shot came and this Gilcrist kid bursts out of the room like it's him instead of the bullet which is fired from the gun. The last we see of him he hits the street and keeps running."

"Trahone dashes in and sees the hole in Larry's head, and then we call the cops."

Costa went in and looked at the room. There wasn't anything to see. A couple of windows, high in the wall gave on the alley. They weren't closed, but they were screened. He

looked at the screens and saw that they were merely set in. Both had been moved recently. He called Trahone and learned that the dishwasher had cleaned them both only the day before.

That much he learned before they went back to the car.

"It's a fine hack," said Chadwick, and his eyes glistened with desire. "I wish I had a hearse like this."

"You will," said Costa. "The devil takes care of his own."

Chadwick caught the faint bitterness in the words. "Meaning what?" he could be huffy when he chose.

"Why hell," said Costa, "meaning nothing at all. I'm sitting on the world, my friend, I have a car, a murder case, what more could a poor cop ask?"

Chadwick shrugged. "Sometimes I think you're screwy. Sometimes I don't understand you."

"Skip it," said Costa. "Sometimes I don't understand myself."

The funny part was that he felt fine. Even with this lousy "yellow-dog" case smeared at him he felt fine. The day was nice, the car ran like a million bucks. He wheeled into the drive beside the city hall and they rode upward to the homicide bureau.

Costa knew he should feel like a country cousin, allowed to visit the city relatives. He knew he should be a little polite to Captain Dunkin and Inspector Kline.

But he was not polite. He was hardly civil as he said. "We looked at Trahone's joint. I want the rest of it."

Kline was fat and round and very grand. Dunkin was lean and sour. They made a team, these two and they were a little bit surprised.

"You're Costa, aren't you, from the Thirty-fourth? Captain Porter phoned."

"I'm Costa," he said, and introduced young Chadwick. "I want the layout on this Lippy Larry kill. I want to know how far you've gone."

They looked at each other, and then at him, and there was no love in their glance. "You know who Gilcrist is?"

Costa knew, a bankroll that walked like a man, a hard fighting, grasping financier whose interest in politics was slight as long as the administration did not get in his way.

"This kid was wild," said Kline, and his voice was tired. "He liked to gamble, and he liked wisenheimer friends. Lippy Larry was one of them, a finger man for Tinkloe."

"They made a night, he and this Roy Gilcrist. They went out to the Shore Inn and they bucked Tinkloe's wheel, they moved to Joe Braburn's joint over the county line. They closed it and then rode back to town and shacked up for a meal in Trahone's joint."

They must have had an argument and the kid went bloo, bloo with his little thirty-two."

"And where's the kid?"

"We haven't found him yet. That's your job, pal. You find him, and you talk to old Gilcris, and you get the kid to cop a plea. The D.A. will listen to manslaughter, one to ten years, and the boy will do ten months with time off for good behavior. Fix that, and you can come downtown."

Costa's mouth was a picture of bitter mirth. Fix that and they should give him a gold badge, give him all the gold badges for that matter . . . fail and he went back to harness. They'd throw him to the wolves, tell the newspaper guys that he had muffed the case, in order to curry Gilcris favor.

## CHAPTER TWO

### All That Money Can Buy

THE Gilcris house was large, and made of brick. Wide terraces flanked it, running out into shrubby gardens. He turned the blue car into the circular drive and hardly heard young Chadwick's comment. "Some house, the old buzzard must roll in dough."

An old and stooped butler let them in. He showed them into a book-lined room. He said that Mr. Gilcris wasn't there, that Mrs. Gilcris was an invalid and did not come below stairs. He was authorized to tell them to talk to Mr. Hunter. Hunter was Mr. Gilcris's secretary, who would be with them in a few minutes.

The butler asked if they cared for a drink and seemed surprised at their refusal. It was obvious that his opinion of the police was far from high. He left them finally and Chadwick wandered about, looking at the room.

Costa did not wander. He stood at the long window through which he could see the drive. His car sat there, quiet in the morning sun, glistening, big and impressive. Again he had the sense of power he always had when he slipped behind the wheel. It was a tonic to his ego, battered by ten years as a precinct cop.

To hell with the Gilcrises and the world. He was Berta Costa, and he knew the score. Kline could seek to trip him on a dirty pressure case, but he and the car could lick the world.

Sound made him turn expecting to see the secretary. Instead he saw the girl. She was tall, and very blonde. Her skin was light save for the faint tinge of color in her cheeks. Her eyes were grey and level.

He was accustomed to sizing people up, to note each little detail about them to store in his mind for future reference. But this girl's beauty shocked him. She looked like a piece of exquisite porcelain.

"We've been expecting you," she said, and

she spoke to Costa as if Chadwick did not count. Her tone was that which she might have used in referring to the plague, and it made Costa suddenly angry without clear reason.

He said, tightly, "I can assure you this is no pleasure tour. I've been in worse houses and liked it better."

She looked at him carefully then. Until that moment he had had no personality for her. He had been as colorless as a clerk, a lamp post or a butler. "Then why did you come?"

"Murder," he said. He wanted to hurt her. He saw that he did hurt her, saw her wince. "Your name may be Gilcris, you may be the daughter of a big shot, but to me you're the sister of a murderer."

"Here," said young Chadwick. "Hey, cut it out. You don't have to play like a goon."

"I'll play any damn way I please." Costa blew out his cheeks lustily. "Keep out of this, pal. I didn't come here for a lesson in manners."

"You could use one," the girl's tone was icy. She gave Chadwick no thanks for trying to take her part. She ignored him completely.

"Sure," said Costa. "I wasn't brought up right. The kids at my dancing school didn't wear white gloves. I'm liable to eat with my knife and put my elbows on the table. I'm a cop, Sweet, and you should have heard. We're rough guys."

She showed her distaste. "You don't need to make an issue of it," she said, keeping her voice under tight control. "I can see you're a boor without any extra advertising."

"The word is mugg," he said. "But skip the chit-chat. I didn't come for tea. I came to explain the facts of life. If your pretty ears can take them, I'll go ahead. I'd rather talk to your old man, but someone for the family has to listen."

"I'm listening," she said and crossing the room, settled into a chair.

Costa couldn't help noting how long her legs were. At least this girl was well put together. Chadwick had noticed it too. He didn't like being kept out of the conversation. After all, he was a detective sergeant himself.

He said, "Don't think the whole department is like this heel, Miss Gilcris. If his superiors could hear him . . ."

Costa made an unpleasant noise. "My superiors don't want a thing to do with this setup. It's poison, so they pick a mugg to handle it. Keep clear, sonny boy. . . ."

"Damn you," said Chadwick. His hands were fists and his eyes had a red tinge. "I'll take care of you later."

Costa thought he probably could. Chadwick weighed a good two-ten and it wasn't fat. He paid no attention but looked at the girl.

"It's this way, sister. Your brother's in a jam. If he were the average kid, there'd be a pickup order on the air and the papers would be full of it. But your dad pulls the weight around this village. The Precinct is handling it, partly because it won't get the noise it would make down town; partly because the Precinct is used to handling beefs, and partly because if this show backfires, it's my neck, and the gold braid is in the clear. That make sense?"

She said, "Yes, but my brother isn't guilty."

"Sure," said Costa. "No one's ever guilty. That's the way our law reads, not guilty until proved so in court. The French are different, they assume everyone's guilty to start. Now listen. Maybe you know where your brother is stashed-out, maybe you don't, but here's the lay. He comes in, cops a plea. The D.A. will go for manslaughter. We'll kind of intimate to the papers it was a halfway accident. There's no jury. The judge gives him one to ten and with time off for good behavior he'll be out on parole in eight months."

"But we gotta work fast. Every minute he's away means more chance of publicity. This way you'll get one set of headlines, and that's all. Where can I find him?"

"But I tell you he didn't do it." She was used to being obeyed. She wasn't used to people arguing with her. She put all that into her voice along with desperation. It broke through the wall of Costa's anger and for an instant he let himself be human, let himself realize that this pretty girl was just another kid, scared and worried.

"Look, honey. Of course you say that, but you'll only make it tougher. Now, our way . . ."

She blazed at him. "I've heard of your way, the police way, railroad innocent people to prison, just to make a name for yourselves. Well, you won't get away with it in Roy's case. I'll fight you with everything I have, every dollar I can lay hands on."

Costa looked at her helplessly. This was the last thing any of them wanted, fight, publicity, lawyers . . . hell. He'd have to see old Gilchrist. He'd have to have the man muzzle his daughter. Costa had enough trouble already without trying to make her see that her actions were hurting rather than helping her family.

He got unexpected aid. A young man was standing in the hall doorway, a well-dressed young man with black hair and a lean, interesting face.

"What's the matter, Margaret?"

"Bob." It was a cry of relief. "Come help me. This . . . this police office . . . they're all so certain Roy killed that man that they're making no effort to find the real murderer."

The young man came in. He glanced for an instant at Chadwick, decided that Costa was the one to talk to and said, "My name's Hunter. Mr. Gilchrist's secretary."

Costa gave his name, indicated Chadwick and wasted no time. He outlined the situation to Hunter in a few careful words. He pointed out that the department was trying to keep things as quiet and orderly as they could. He wound up with an appeal.

"Will you please explain to sister that if she keeps on in what she's talking about she'll spoil everything her father, the mayor, and the department is trying to do. We aren't railroad the kid. We don't give a damn about him, but a man is dead and although everyone will admit that he was a louse, we can't just mark it off the books because the killer happens to be the son of a big shot."

Hunter smiled faintly, his small mustache lifting a little at the corner. Then he turned to the girl. "Sergeant Costa's right, Margaret. From the evidence there can be little doubt that Roy is guilty. Much as we dislike the thought, you'd be doing him a disservice to publicize more than need be his misfortune."

"Is that all the help you can offer me?" The words were like a cry, they told Costa much about the relationship of these two.

He said to Hunter, "Do you, or any of the family know where the boy is?"

Hunter shook his head. "We don't. Mr. Gilchrist is at his office. He's talked to the mayor, the district attorney. He'll cooperate in any way that he can. I give you my word that if we learn anything of Roy's whereabouts, we'll get in touch with you at once."

Costa accepted defeat. He pretended not to notice that the girl ignored his goodbye and he moved into the hall with Hunter and Chadwick following.

A maid in a black and white uniform came down the steps. She said to Costa, "Mrs. Gilchrist would like to see you."

Hunter tried to interfere. He said, "Mrs. Gilchrist is not well. I don't believe . . ."

The maid looked at him coldly and without love. "Those are orders." Her voice was flat, expressionless.

Costa's curiosity prompted him. He followed the maid up the steps, leaving Chadwick with the secretary.

The room into which they came was long and bright with light blue walls and fluffy drapes. A woman sat in a wheeled chair beside the window. The chair had a portable table across the arms and cards for solitaire were spread out before her. She looked small, and tired, but her voice was strong.

"Come in young man, and close the door."

He obeyed.

"Pour yourself a drink."

HE HESITATED, then obeyed. He knew that she studied him, and her grey eyes were shrewd and bright, a little like her daughter's.

"You don't look like a cop," she said.

He started at the use of the term. She saw the start, laughed and indicated a set of book shelves with a wave of her hand. "I read the detective stories," she said. "I know the slang, at least the stuff writers use."

He came to sit on a small stool close at her side. "You're quite a guy."

"So are you. I expected something with flat feet and a thick head, like Inspector Kline."

Costa laughed again. He felt relaxed and at ease. He wondered what she wanted. He realized this was her method of softening him up, but he didn't care.

She said, "They never tell me anything. I fell from a horse, twenty years ago. It spoiled my back. I have to be lifted in and out of this damned go-cart. My husband forgets I was ever anything else. He's pretty much of a stuffed shirt and he's gotten worse. My son has run a little wild, I guess. His father is enough to drive anyone wild. My daughter doesn't know what life is and thinks she doesn't care, and that secretary in pants sits around scheming ways to marry her."

"So?" he said.

"So my maid Emma tells me what little I know. They've tried to fire her but I raise so much hell when they do that she always stays. I don't monkey in their lives. I live my own. I read those stories. I read about shaved decks, and loaded dice, and "readers" and crooked gamblers. It's fun when you have nothing else to do. I work out gambling systems, and my son tries them out. Some work, some don't."

"So . . ." he said again.

"So Roy is supposed to have killed a man."

"That's right."

"A man called Larry the Lip, or Lippy Larry. . . . I met him once. Roy brought him here. Margaret thought it was terrible. She didn't know that Roy brought him because it would amuse me. Quite a character, no morals. . . ."

"That's right," said Costa.

The woman in the wheeled chair chuckled. "Not very wordy, are you? Tight-mouthed, keep your own counsel."

Costa shrugged. Her voice changed. "I know what you said down stairs. Emma listened at the hall door and brought me word. I realize what you're trying to do, but Margaret, although she is a fool, is right about one thing."

"Roy didn't shoot that man. I don't say that because I'm his mother. I say it because the killing makes no sense. What motive

could my son have . . . killings without motive of some kind. . . ."

"They were drunk," said Costa.

"Not that drunk," she said. "I know my son well. He can't get that drunk because he gets sick first. Three drinks are his limit, the fourth empties him."

"Well then . . ."

She said, "My husband is so worried about his good name that it never occurred to him the boy might not be guilty. He's so used to fixing things that he started out at once without even giving Roy the benefit of the doubt."

"I can understand that."

"Sure you can," she smiled again. "You're smart. I believe I like you."

"Stop needling," he grinned. "What is it you want?"

"You to find the killer, of course. To clear the boy."

"That's easy in stories."

She shrugged. "Cops do catch murderers in real life. Do that, and then come ask me for what you want. If money will buy it. . . ."

"Money won't," he said, and his mouth turned down.

"What will?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I've never known. At the moment it's a big car. I saw it and I wanted it. It cost more than I could afford, but it's parked out in the drive right now. I get what I want when I find what it is. I'm one of the devil's children, and the devil cares for his own."

"Nuts," she said. "I can tell by your face that you aren't satisfied. But do this one thing for me. Before you spend all your time sending my boy to prison, have a look around. See what you can find."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Cross Draw Gun Jockey

COSTA pulled the car under the trees of the side street and cut off the key. Chadwick looked at him and there was dislike in his eyes. "It's men like you that give the force a bad name."

"Sure," said Costa.

"Did you have to act that way to the girl? Didn't you ever hear of making friends and influencing people?"

"Yeah."

Chadwick gave it up. "Why are we stopped here?"

"You'll know in a minute," said Costa. He watched the main street intersection in sullen silence. Finally the sound of a car broke the morning quiet and a small coupe flashed by. There were two people in it, one Margaret Gilchrist, the other Hunter, the secretary.

Costa started the blue car's motor. He wait-

ed a little while, then pulled into the Boulevard. The coupe was two blocks ahead.

Chadwick exploded. "Why follow them?"

"If anyone knows where Roy is hiding, they do," Costa was not impatient. He toolled the big car along, conscious of the power under the long hood.

Chadwick said, "To trail that girl as if she were a criminal. Are you crazy?"

Costa grinned sourly to himself. "Don't let her throw you, bud. The gal can take care of herself. She's no wall flower that you have to wrap in waxed paper. They've had her wrapped that way too long now." He was silent as the car wound through traffic, crossed the river and pulled into a walled parking place.

Chadwick caught his breath. "Isn't this Tinkloe's place?"

Costa nodded. He waited on the roadway until he was certain the girl and Hunter had moved inside, then he drove in and parked beside the small coupe. They were the only cars in the parking lot. It was the wrong time of day for business at Tinkloe's.

The supper room was almost deserted. The chairs had not been removed from the tables where the moppers had stacked them. At the far end, the orchestra shell was lighted and a girl with a honey bob was clutching a mike and singing into it with a deep-throated voice.

Al Hostman, the band leader was in shirt sleeves, directing the rehearsal. Tinkloe stood at the far side of the dance floor, rolling a cigar between his thick lips. He was a short man, and very fat. His head looked like a marble, a little too small on the breadth of his shoulders.

He turned and Costa and Chadwick stepped in, but he did not see them. His full attention was given to Hunter and Margaret Gilchrist.

Costa would have stayed in the background, but Chadwick pushed ahead and there was nothing left but to follow. They came up in time to hear the girl say, "I'll give you five thousand dollars to tell me where my brother is."

Tinkloe's chuckle was audible above the noise of the orchestra.

"Good morning, Miss Gilchrist. It might surprise you, but I'd be very glad to give the same sum."

It did surprise her. It hadn't occurred to her that a man like Tinkloe might have five thousand. She did not know that his back rooms handled a nightly play across their green tables which ran twenty times that amount.

She said, almost breathlessly, "Why do you want to find Roy?"

"He killed one of my men," said Tinkloe. "You won't understand this perhaps, but a

person like me only lasts as long as he protects his men. I didn't love Larry. He was a two bit louse, but as long as he was working my side of the street, the guy that knocks him down takes a shot at me."

She said, "He didn't do it. Can't you see, he didn't do it."

Tinkloe was polite, but not convinced. "Naturally you don't figure he did it, sweetheart. In your shoes, I'd have to play it the same way." He turned as if no longer interested and saw Costa for the first time.

Something in the fat face altered a little. The small eyes gained a caution that they had not held before. "Ah, copper?"

Costa said, "Tinkloe," and let it pass as a greeting. They were old acquaintances, but not friends.

"Still stuck at Thirty-fourth?" There was a note of sarcasm in the fat man's voice.

"Still stuck," said Costa.

They looked each other over as two strange dogs might. "I thought," said Tinkloe, "that I asked you not to come here. That was some time ago."

"This is business," said Costa. "I'm after Larry's killer."

Tinkloe was surprised. He didn't get it and things he didn't get worried him. "A precinct cop," he was speaking to himself.

Costa smiled. "Larry was your man. He wasn't very important. None of your men are very important, pal, not even you. The boys downtown only stir themselves when important people get knocked over."

Tinkloe didn't like that. His face got a little color. It wasn't red, rather a kind of lemon yellow. He thought he was very important.

"Wise guy," he said, and made the words sound like an oath.

Costa shrugged. "Okay, so give. Baby here," he indicated the silent Margaret Gilchrist with a little wave of his hand, "Thinks her brother is innocent. She says he had no motive to kill Larry. Got any ideas?"

**S**INCE when was I a stoolie?"

"Since you want to find the guy who took a crack at you by knocking Larry off."

They considered each other. The fat man's eyes were small, wary. "I'm not talking," he said.

A voice behind him said, "He didn't do it. He didn't do it."

Costa swung around. The girl who had been cooing into the mike had walked over to the edge of the little stage. The orchestra had ceased to practice. Everyone in the room was watching.

Tinkloe said in a low voice, "Keep out of this, Sue."

"Like hell," she said. "I'm not going to sit

on my hands while you railroad Roy to prison."

Costa glanced toward Margaret Gilcrist, wondering how she was taking this unexpected help from the singer. The tall blonde's face was a study of conflicting emotions. She said in a subdued voice, "Thank you."

"Don't thank me," the singer spun to face her. "It's you and your damn family that drove Roy into this. He was so bored with your stupid life that he came down here for a little excitement, and now look at him, look at him . . ." She was struggling against ready tears but there wasn't much of the crybaby in her and she turned back to face Tinkloe. "As for you, you fat roach, if anyone had Larry killed, you're it. You knew he'd been knocking down on the games. I heard you warn him yourself . . . oh, you didn't pull the trigger . . . that's not your way. You sent Gordon to do it, if . . ."

She broke off for a man had stepped up behind her. He was a little man and his small round head was entirely hairless; even the edges of his eye sockets which should have had brows and lashes were bare.

It gave him an indecent look as if he wore a skull in place of a head.

He caught the singer's arm before she knew he was there, and twisted it up behind her until it seemed that the bone would break. "I don't like you to talk like that about me, baby," the hairless man lisped.

"Please, Gordon," she was struggling to free herself. Costa took a quick step forward. Gordon jumped back, flipping his coat open as he did so. He wore a small gun, holstered at his left waist, its bone grip forward. He tried to cross draw with his right hand.

Costa grinned even as he moved. His left hand hit the man's right elbow, pushing it on around, twisting Gordon's small body. Costa's right forearm came up under Gordon's chin, pulling his head backward. His knee was behind the man and he bent the small body backward across it until Gordon almost snapped in two at the waist.

"You need a good gun jockey," he told Tinkloe. "A cross draw was a sucker draw." He helped himself to Gordon's gun and released him, stepping back quickly. He'd acted so rapidly that neither Chadwick nor Tinkloe had moved.

The blonde girl was watching him with wide eyes, the singer was nursing her twisted arm. Bob Hunter, the secretary, chuckled. "Very neat."

Gordon's hairless face was white. "I'll get you for that, copper."

Tinkloe said, "Here, here." He didn't like any of this. "It's your fault, Gordon."

The hairless man almost sobbed. "No filthy skunk is going to handle me. I'll get him."

Costa said pleasantly. "You asked for it," and hit Gordon with all he had.

The little man seemed to run backward with the force of the blow, his feet staying under him until he crashed against the plastered wall. He hung there an instant as if his coat collar were hooked on an invisible nail, then he slowly slid to a sitting position, stayed there for what seemed a minute, then fell sideways, out cold.

No one said anything for a breathless space, then Tinkloe shook his head at Costa. "I wouldn't be in your shoes, copper. Gordon will kill you. You've hurt his feelings."

Hunter laughed. No one else thought it was funny. The singer was still nursing her twisted arms. She said to Costa, "I never thought I'd thank a cop for anything."

He paid no attention. "Keep that little rat out of my way." His voice was heated without being loud.

"Better collar him. He'll kill you."

"To hell with him," said Costa. "I'm taking you in."

The fat man was really startled. "Me, are you crazy?"

**SURE,** said Costa. "The boys downtown told me to handle it my way." He lowered his voice so the distant orchestra couldn't overhear. "I'm going to frame you, louse. I've got Gordon's gun in my pocket. We'll see that a slug from it fits the hole they dug in Lippy Larry at the morgue. I've been wanting you for a long time."

"You're nuts," Tinkloe wet his lips. "You can't make that stick and you know it. Your just a precinct cop."

"Sure," said Costa, "but Gilcrist is a friend of the mayor's. They'll love this, springing the kid. I've got it all worked out." He glanced toward the singer. "Sue here will swear she overheard you order Gordon to smoke Larry out, won't you, darling?"

She had odd colored eyes, not quite matching. She said, "I'll swear to anything you say, copper."

Tinkloe's eyes hated her. She gave him a sweet, twisting smile. "How do you like this?"

He didn't answer. Costa went on. "I've got a stoolie that I could collar. He'll swear he saw Gordon in the alley behind Trahone's, the bullet will match, what the hell more do we need? It's a cinch. Gordon trailed them to the eatery, saw them go into the back room, went around and fired through an open window. The screens were cleaned yesterday, he could have raised one a little without disturbing any dirt. But we might arrange to find his prints, although we won't need them."

He was quite proud of himself. It really sounded possible. He stole a look at the blonde



girl and found disapproval on her face. The same disapproval was mirrored in Chadwick's broad countenance. It was obvious that the young detective thought Costa was again giving the force a bad name.

Tinkloe took a few steps, pulled a chair from one of the tables and lowered his bulk into it. His heavy cheeks sagged as if he were very, very tired. "I believe you would do it at that."

"Why not?" said Costa. "I owe you nothing, and a frame on you my friend would be no miscarriage of justice. You've gotten away with murder for a long time."

"What is it you want?" The fight seemed to have gone out of the fat man. Costa wasn't fooled. Tinkloe was still the most dangerous person in this room.

"The truth," he said, savagely. "Give me a reason why young Gilchrist should have killed Larry . . . or tell me who killed him."

"Gilchrist killed him," the fat man was toneless, "and he had a reason. Larry was putting the arm on him, shaking him down."

Costa showed his disbelief. "You're nuts. What did he have on the kid?"

Tinkloe shook his head. "I don't know. All I know is that they've been chasing around together the last month. I asked Larry the score. I made a crack about it being love or something. He just grinned. Then I said that the family wouldn't go for their darling boy running around with a heel like Larry and Larry said that he didn't have to worry about that. They had to stand for it, because he could put the arm on someone for something, anytime."

"Meaning the boy?"

"Who else? I guess the kid had gotten mixed up in something and Larry knew, so, he was cashing in."

"That's a lie." It was the singer. "Roy never did anything bad in his life."

Costa ignored her for the moment, his attention still on Tinkloe. "You're sure it wasn't someone else Larry had the goods on, the father for instance?"

Tinkloe's round eyes got wide. "Hey, I never thought of that."

Margaret Gilchrist said in a low voice, "You are rotten, aren't you. Stop him Bob."

"Hunter took a step forward. "Now look, Sergeant. . . ."

Costa said, "Keep out of this." There was something in his voice that left the secretary with no answer. He turned back to Tinkloe.

"What about it? From what Larry said it could have been the father, or mother, or this girl here," he indicated Margaret with a jerk of his thumb.

"Well, sure. He just said it was. . . . I'm not certain how he put it . . . a connection with the family I think he said, then he

laughed and said, 'That's right, I'm connected with the Gilchrists now. I don't have to worry. I'm set.'"

"Okay," said Costa. "That's all for now." He glanced toward Gordon who was beginning to stir. "But don't forget, fatso, that I've still got sonny's rod, and that if it looks smart, I'll frame you right into the middle of this thing."

He broke off and turned to the dancer. "Come on, sweetheart. After what's happened here, I don't think this is a good place for you. You'd better let me ride you away from here."

She didn't argue. She said, "I'll get my coat." Costa grinned at Margaret Gilchrist. She gave him an icy stare.

He said, "Look, honey, you were sour because none of the cops went to bat for your loving brother, so now, I'm in there swinging and you give me the ice treatment."

SHE said in a suppressed voice, "I don't want you to help him by framing everyone in sight."

"Don't be so choosy," he said and turned as the dancer reappeared from the dressing rooms. They went back out into the sunlight and Costa motioned the singer toward his car. The blonde hesitated, then she said, "Can I ride with you. Your partner can ride with Bob."

Chadwick did not care for this. Neither did Hunter. It amused Costa to see their faces. He said, "This is my lucky day. Two girls to ride with me, when I usually don't have one." He walked around the blue car and held the door for them.

The singer told Margaret Gilchrist, "You get in the middle. I'll be getting out first."

The tall blonde hesitated, then slipped into the middle of the blue leather seat. Costa helped the singer in and went around to get under the wheel.

Sue said, "If you'll just drop me anywhere downtown."

Costa was starting the motor. The blonde said, "Do all policeman drive expensive cars like this?"

"When we can shake enough people down to buy them," said Costa. He swung out of the parking place and edged the car's speed up to forty. He felt good, fine, in fact. He could be a big shot, driving this car, with these two girls. He couldn't recall seeing two prettier girls in any one car at any time.

He glanced in the rear view mirror and saw that Hunter with Chadwick at his side was trailing along.

The blonde said, "You know, I think you're something of a fake."

"Do you," said Costa. "You don't know me, baby. I'm the world's prize heel."

She ignored the words. "I don't think you

meant to frame that gambler at all. I think you were just talking."

"You've been reading my mail." He was amused. "Tinkloe didn't think I was faking, and Tinkloe knows more about me than you do."

"I'm not so sure."

Costa wondered if she were playing with him. He'd heard that rich dames like to amuse themselves with muggs sometimes. He spoke across at the dancer. "Where do you live, Sue?"

"Don't bother," she said. "I'm not going home. Just drop me downtown. I've got to look for another job."

"You're going home," said Costa. "Let's not be heroic. I can easily find out where you live." He slowed the car a little as he spoke.

The singer looked at him and her face was suddenly thin, and drawn, and bitter. She fumbled at the purse in her lap, and tried to draw her hand free.

Costa reached across the blonde. He grabbed the singer's wrist and twisted the small gun from the purse. A second twist and it slid from her fingers into her lap.

He scooped it up and dropped it into his pocket beside Gordon's gun. He was making quite a collection it seemed. "That won't help him," he said.

The dancer was crying. The blonde looked startled. "What is all this?"

"Your brother's hiding at her apartment," said Costa. "Couldn't you figure that out by yourself?" He was suddenly tired. Nothing ever seemed to change. People always did the same thing in about the same way.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Big Stir

**T**HERE was nothing fancy about the apartment. It was old, and the brick wall which had been painted once should have been painted again.

No one said anything as they got out. The singer was silent, sullen, the blonde uncertain.

The little coupe pulled up behind them and Costa told Chadwick to wait outside. "The kid may make a dash," he said. "Come on, the rest of you."

They went in, the four of them. The two girls quiet, Hunter saying to the blonde, "Don't worry, dear, don't worry. Everything will be all right."

Costa wondered why some men always insisted on saying the wrong thing. The blonde knew that everything wasn't all right. Hunter telling her so only made himself look like a fool.

Costa wondered if the man were a fool. It

didn't seem that a big shot like Gilcrist would employ a fool for a secretary, but you never knew.

The carpet on the stairs was so worn that you couldn't tell what the original color had been. The hall smelled of cooked food, as if the ventilation was very poor. The singer led them to a door at the end of the second floor.

All the fight seemed to have gone out of her. She fitted a key into the lock and pushed the door open, calling as she did so. Costa was at her shoulder, his gun ready. You could never tell about these educated punks that went sour. Sometimes they wanted to play Dilling.

As soon as he saw Roy Gilcrist he shoved the girl out of the way and stepped in.

Gilcrist didn't know who he was. Costa certainly didn't look like a cop, but the gun in his hand was a warning.

The boy was tall, and he looked a lot like his sister. He stood in the center of the small room for a full moment, held there by surprise, then he came forward slowly. His hair was mussed and his eyes heavy with sleep. "What is this?"

"A pinch," said Costa. He got out the bracelets and with a quick move snapped one on Gilcrist's slender wrist.

The boy looked down at the circlet of bright steel. He looked at Costa, then at the two girls, finally at Hunter, and his mouth was a bitter line.

"Old homework."

The singer gave a little cry. She pushed past Costa and threw her arms around the boy's neck. "I didn't mean to bring them here. He was too smart for me."

"It's all right." He touched her hair gently. "Take it easy, honey. It's all right."

Costa said, "I suppose you know why we're here. I suppose you know that even you can't shoot a man and get away with it."

"I didn't shoot him," said the boy. "Why should I want to kill Larry?"

Costa shrugged. "I'm no judge, pal. I'm just a cop. The setup is this way." He went on, and talked fast. He explained about how it could be worked, what could be done. "All you have to do is cop a plea," he wound up, "and everything will be lovely."

"You've got a strange idea of loveliness," the boy said. "Ten years in prison holds little attraction."

"It won't be ten," Costa repeated. "You'll get one to ten, that means you'll serve one... perhaps eight months with good behavior."

"I'd rather not."

"Of course you wouldn't." It was the blonde. "We'll fight them, Roy. I'll stand behind you. I'll make Dad stand behind you."

The secretary wet his lips. "Old man," he said, and he was talking to the boy. "Old man,

I know exactly how you feel. It isn't a nice thing, to be in stir, but sometimes it's easier that way, and think of what you save your family."

"Bob," the blonde had looked at him.

He said, "I'm only trying to help." He said it hurriedly. "I'm only thinking of your father and mother, and of you."

"If you're thinking of me, help Roy."

"I'm helping him. Everyone's helping him, even Costa here. It's the best way, by far the best way."

"It seems," the boy said, bitterly, "that if I get much more help it will kill me. Oh, I can take what I have coming, but I didn't shoot Larry. Someone shot him through the alley window."

"Then why'd you run?" said Costa. "Why run if you're innocent?"

The boy passed a hand across his eyes. "I was drunk," he said. "Not very drunk, but enough so that my judgement wasn't working clearly. The waitress shouted that I was a murderer. I knew Larry had a police record. I knew he wasn't a very good citizen and I was in his company. I lost my head. I came over here, and Sue hid me."

**T**HE story could be true of course. In Costa's experience the innocent often seemed the most guilty. He shrugged. "It's not for me to judge. I'll take you to the precinct, or send you there with a man I have downstairs. You can make a fuss, demand a lawyer, get your name and picture across every front page. That's up to you. It's almost out of my hands." "I want to think," the boy was looking around.

"Think about this," said Costa. "Was Larry blackmailing you?"

"Me," the surprise was obvious. "But why should Larry blackmail me? I'd done nothing which I had to hide."

"Perhaps," said Costa, and jerked his head toward the silent singer. "What about her? Was Larry threatening to tell your father about her?"

The boy laughed. "I've already told him," he said. "I've told my mother. We were going to marry in the fall."

Costa looked at the blonde. "You knew. You should have saved us both trouble."

She met his look directly. "Why should I save you trouble? That's why I went to Tink-loe's. I supposed she'd be here. I wanted to see her."

Costa tried another track. "Then was he blackmailing someone else, your father perhaps, or your mother, or sweetheart here?"

The blonde said, "You always manage to be insulting."

"I'm a cop," Costa told her as if that explained everything.

Roy Gilcrist started to shake his head. He said, then, slowly as if reconsidering. "He did act funny after I took him to the house."

"What'd he say?"

"It wasn't what he said. He just seemed very pleased about something, like a cat who has just swallowed the bird."

"Who'd he see there?" Costa felt as if he were on the edge of something, he didn't know quite what.

"Well, everyone I guess. Dad was in the library, dictating when we came in. I introduced him and the old man acted kind of funny. I'd expected him to order Larry from the house. He didn't. He was very cordial. So was mother of course. Mother gets a big kick out of meeting characters. Margaret was the only one who got sore. She walked out."

Costa looked at the blonde. "Why, sweetheart?"

Her voice was indignant. "It's rather obvious, isn't it? This . . . this Larry was hardly the type I was interested in."

"What do you think, Hunter?" Costa looked at the secretary. "Did you find Larry amusing?"

Hunter shrugged. "Frankly I didn't pay much attention. Mr. Gilcrist and I were very busy at the time. I went back over my notes while they were talking."

Costa said, "None of this helps us much. Okay, that's all." He led young Gilcrist onto the hall with the party following him. At the foot of the steps he turned the prisoner over to Chadwick. "Mind driving them to the station?" he asked Hunter.

The secretary did mind. He glanced at the blonde as if for instructions. She said, "I'll ride with Sergeant Costa if he doesn't object."

That was what Costa wanted. He didn't mind at all.

But he was surprised by her action. He wondered what she hoped to gain by riding with him, and he could be direct when he chose.

He said so as he turned the blue car down Chestnut and then into Grand. The early afternoon traffic was heavy and it reminded him that he had had no lunch.

"Did you come along for the ride?" he asked, "or do you expect me to feed you?"

She smiled, a tiny twitch of the lips which lasted for an instant only. "You're probably the rudest person I've ever met. You're so rude that I'm beginning to suspect you of being honest."

"Don't say that aloud," he warned. "I'd probably lose my place on the force."

She said, "You manage to sound bitter too. What does a policeman think about?"

"How to pay for this car." He'd found a parking place and was pulling into it.

The words startled her and she frowned for

an instant, then smiled again, only this time there was no pleasure in the smile. "All right. I'll give you five thousand dollars if you prove that my brother didn't kill that man."

Costa leaned forward and removed the switch key without looking at her. "But he is guilty."

Her white teeth made a line across her lower lip. "I don't believe it, but I won't waste time arguing. Five thousand if you'll clear him."

"I thought you didn't like the idea of me framing Tinkloe."

"I didn't, isn't there some other way?"

"**L**ADY," said Costa. "You want the world with a piece of cheese on it. Keep your money. I wasn't hinting. I wouldn't take it if you folded it and stuck the bundle in my pocket. Maybe I am honest. Maybe that's what's wrong with me, or maybe I'm just not interested in money, much. Come on, let's eat."

He took her into a little side street restaurant run by an Italian and his family. They had spaghetti and meat balls, flat hard crusted bread and red wine.

"You know," he said. "I used to amuse myself, sitting around, dreaming of owning a blue convertible and taking a nice blonde to lunch. Only goes to show that if you live long enough anything might happen."

She said, "You're a strange person."

Costa shrugged. "Just average. I could be selling insurance, or automobiles. It happens I'm on the cops. But not all men change because you stick a badge in their vest pocket."

"Then why have you got it in for my brother?"

He looked at her. She was very nice to look at. Just sitting here across the table did something to him. It was like driving the blue car.

He tried to put it into words and didn't know how. He said, "Most people think cops have it in for the people they go after. They don't, mostly."

"You had it in for that gambler and his gunman."

"That's different," said Costa. "That's personal. I don't like them. They're rats. I don't care much for rats."

"Won't Gordon come after you?"

"Probably."

"Aren't you worried?"

He looked up and found her grey eyes steady on his. "I'm scared as hell," he said. "I won't walk past a dark alley for months without my stomach crawling a little. But what am I supposed to do, quit my job, run and hide?"

"No, I suppose not." She was silent, considering. "What are you going to do now?"

"Go see your father."

"You won't like him."

"I don't expect to," said Costa. "I've met men like him before. We never get along."

"I'm not going with you. I'm going to talk to a lawyer."

He leaned forward across the small table. "Do one thing for me. Don't try and get your brother any help today. Tomorrow you can do as you like, but today, keep quiet."

She said, "I wish I could trust you. I can't trust anyone, it seems."

He rose and gathered up the check. "Can I drop you somewhere?"

She shook her head. "I think I've seen enough of you," she said. "You know, you're a very unsettling person."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### No Time for Comedy

**T**HE Gilcrist building wasn't the tallest one in town but it was one of the more fancy. The elevator lifted Costa to the top floor and he mounted concrete steps to the penthouse above.

Floyd Gilcrist was small. Costa was surprised. The boy and girl must have gotten their height from their mother's side. He came in and nodded to the seated man and knew that Gilcrist thought him a lackey reporting for work.

"I've talked to the mayor," said Gilcrist. "He tells me that my dear son is safe in a cell."

"He is," said Costa, "and your family might have saved me trouble by telling me about Sue."

The little man behind the big desk blinked. "Oh, you mean that night club singer, a passing fancy."

"I don't care how passing it was. That's where the boy was hiding." Costa's tone was heated.

"Now listen young man . . ." Gilcrist didn't like the tone.

"You listen," said Costa. "You're getting wound up to tell me that you'll have my job if I don't mend my manners and keep a civil tongue in my head. Don't let it worry you. My job isn't much and it grew wings this morning when they first handed me this case. I had my orders. I found your son. I explained the manslaughter deal. Whether he will go for it or not, I don't know."

"I'll make him," said Gilcrist. "If that's all that's worrying you, forget it."

"And your daughter. Can you handle her? She's talking lawyers. She wants to fight."

"She has no money," said Gilcrist, "none except what I give her. I can stop that."

"What about your wife?"

"A fool," said Gilchrist.

"No," said Costa, "a very smart lady. It might pay you to spend a little more time with her. You might learn some things you don't seem to know."

The little man gasped, then started to explode. Costa stopped him by holding up one hand. "Wait. Your family is your business, the Lippy Larry kill is mine. Was Larry trying to blackmail you?"

"Blackmail me . . . are you crazy?"

"It seems so," said Costa. "Every time I make that suggestion, the person I question comes through with that classic remark. I just wondered. What do you know about the man? You didn't by any chance, lose a hunk of dough at Tinkloe's and forget to pay?"

"I never gamble."

"But you did meet Lippy Larry."

"I met him," said Gilchrist. "My son brought him to the house."

"And you talked to him."

"Why, yes. I even sent my secretary to offer him money to leave my son alone."

"Oh, that was it," Costa thought he had the answer. "How much did you pay?"

"Nothing," said Gilchrist. "Hunter came back and said that the man wasn't interested."

Costa wasn't satisfied. Again he had the feeling that he was on the edge of something without quite being able to reach out and touch it. But he could get no more from Gilchrist. He left the office and went down to police headquarters. He didn't go near Inspector Kline or Captain Dunkin, he went in and looked up Lippy Larry's record. The man had done two prison stretches, both for minor shake-downs, one here, one in a California prison.

It didn't help much, and he left headquarters. As he climbed in the car he saw a man lurking in a doorway. It was Gordon. The hairless man was watching, making no effort at concealment. It was as if he wanted Costa to see him. He grinned as Costa turned his head and the grin was not pleasant to see.

"Here it comes," thought Costa, the skin at the back of his neck crawling a little. He knew that from now on, he'd never be entirely free of a fear of Gordon. The hairless man was a good hater, but he'd pick his own time and place to strike.

He put the blue car in gear and drove out to the Gilchrist home. The blonde hadn't returned. Hunter was in the library, at work. He looked up as Costa came in.

"How you coming?"

"I've seen Gilchrist," said Costa. "He says that he tried to buy Larry off, that you handled it but the man wouldn't listen."

"That's right," Hunter agreed. "He wouldn't listen. He was a strange character."

"Ever see him before?"

The secretary shook his head. "No, why do you ask?"

Costa shrugged. "No reason. I wonder if I could talk with Mrs. Gilchrist?"

Hunter hesitated. "I guess so, I'll see." He went into the hall and up the steps. Costa waited until he got to the top, then walked back into the library. He walked over and looked at the sheets of paper Hunter had been covering. They were income tax forms.

COSTA whistled. He hadn't known Gilchrist had so much money. He hadn't known there was that much money in the whole world. He picked up the sheet and studied the figures, heard Hunter call and turned toward the hall. The secretary was coming down the stairs. Costa stuffed the tax blank into his pocket. It wouldn't be good, found examining those tax papers.

"I'm sorry," said Hunter. "She's asleep. Her maid refuses to disturb her. She's a very positive character, the maid."

"I heard that," said Costa, and took his leave. There was a small sedan waiting outside the park gates. As he drove past it he had a clear view of Gordon's hairless face. Again the skin at the back of his neck crawled. He glanced in the rear view mirror. Gordon was following.

Costa had the impulse to turn the blue car loose. He knew that it could distance the gunman's sedan within a couple of blocks. But what was the use. Gordon would just pick him up again. The man was dogged, as dogged as death.

He went back downtown and up to homicide. Inspector Kline saw him come in and actually smiled. "They phoned from the Thirty-fourth. They have young Gilchrist in a cell. Good work."

Costa nodded. He might have told Kline that Margaret Gilchrist was going to get lawyers . . . was going to fight. He didn't. He could go quietly away and forget the whole thing. He'd done his part. The rest was up to the elder Gilchrist, the mayor, and the D.A.

"I'm a fool," he thought. "I suppose I've always been a fool. Just because a blonde who wouldn't spit on me is worried about a no-good brother I have to stick my neck out."

He went into the finger print room, and looked at files. He got on the teletype and talked to San Francisco, then Los Angeles. He learned something. He learned that Tinkloe and Gordon had both operated on the coast, and that Larry the Lip had been with them, even then. He called Washington finally and talked to the FBI.

"Jees," he muttered. "I'm getting important. I'm raising hell all over the place."

When he went back out it was already dark. He turned the nose of the blue car to-

ward Tinkloe's joint across the river. He hadn't seen him, but he was certain that Gordon was still following.

"If I want my neck chopped, why don't I just stick it in a meat grinder. It's simpler, and just as easy."

He crossed the bridge and turned into the walled parking lot. As he was getting out of his car, another pulled up beside him and the hairless man gave him a sardonic grin.

"Sucker," said Gordon.

Costa nodded. "You're telling me." His stomach felt a little funny, kind of like it might if a deck were swaying under him. He judged that this was fear. He'd never quite felt that way before. It was like waiting to take a walk with death.

Gordon took his time locking the car. Apparently he hadn't expected Costa to wait for him. Finally he turned around and fell into step.

"I won't kill you here, copper. It ain't good for Tinkloe's business."

Costa was pleasant about it. "Of course not. You found that out when you gunned that ham in that Culver City night club eight years ago."

The man's eyes came down to slits. "You been reading my mail."

"Sure," said Costa, "and looking at your finger prints, and pictures, and talking to the boys on the coast. They were real glad when you left L.A."

The killer grinned. "Were they now? Hell, I'm famous."

Costa didn't bother to answer. He pushed open the door and stepped into the club, resisting the check girl who tried to take his hat, and the headwaiter who tried to find him a table. Instead he said to Gordon, "Where's your boss?"

"How should I know?" said Gordon. "I've been tailing you all afternoon."

"Let's try the office."

They tried the office. Tinkloe was there and the fat man was not glad to see them. He looked at Costa, than at Gordon. "I told you to lay off," his voice held a warning for the hairless man.

"Hell," said Gordon. "I haven't even scratched him, yet."

Costa didn't feel like smiling. This wasn't kidding, although it sounded that way. "Tinkloe doesn't want to take a runout as he had to from the coast. He's got it nice and quiet here. He wants it to stay that way."

"Yeah," said Gordon, and was amused.

"Yeah," said Tinkloe, and wasn't. "Lay off this cop."

Costa had the feeling that they might have been discussing the cutting up of a mutton chop. They had forgotten he was there.

He said, "I came out to get you."

THE fat gambler was surprised. "To get me, you mean a pinch?"

"Let's not call it that," said Costa. "Let's say we're going to visit friends."

Tinkloe said, carefully, "This isn't a gag?"

"It isn't a gag."

"I could take him now," said Gordon. His hand was in his pocket, on a gun. He was through with cross draws, Costa saw.

Tinkloe studied Costa's face. "No," he said. "He couldn't make anything stick." He went over and picked up a derby. It was a little too small, sitting on his fat head. It made him look funny, very funny.

The blue car purred back across the bridge and up through the early evening city traffic. Tinkloe said, "I don't like this. Gordon's following, you know. He'll kill you before the night's out and every cop in town will blame me."

"You better do something about it," said Costa, very conscious of the lights of the trailing car.

"I can't. He won't listen to me."

"Larry the Lip wouldn't listen either," said Costa. "You've got one out, my friend, and one only." He didn't speak again until he swung the big car through the stone gates and up the curving drive which led to the Gilcrist residence.

The butler answered the door. He must have been accustomed to Costa by this time for he stood aside for them to enter. They walked in, through the hall and entered the library.

Gilcrist was in a chair before the fire, a tall glass in his hand. The blonde and Bob Hunter stood in a far corner. They all turned as Costa and Tinkloe stepped into the hall door and Gilcrist muttered a greeting, getting heavily to his feet.

"I've talked to my daughter. . ." he began, but Costa held up his hand. "Wait a minute. I know who killed Lippy Larry and it wasn't your son."

Gilcrist jumped as if he'd been stabbed in the seat with a needle. He said, a little hoarsely, "This is no time for jokes, Sergeant."

"It's no joke," said Costa. "I know who shot Lippy and why. He was shot through the rear window from the alley."

Margaret Gilcrist had come forward. "You mean that?" She sounded as if she refused to credit her ears.

"I mean it," he said, "but I'm not certain you're going to like this."

"Like it," she was surprised. "Of course I'll like it. I love it. I think you're wonderful."

It had been a long time since anyone had told Costa that they thought he was wonderful and he liked it fine. If more blondes would go around telling him that he'd like it



better. Not that he thought for one minute that the girl really meant it, but hell, a guy could dream once in a while couldn't he?

Gilcris's secretary said in a dry voice, "I hope you haven't gotten their hopes too high."

"I haven't," said Costa. "You're it. I've tagged you, sweetheart. I decided this afternoon."

For an instant no one understood, then Gilcris cleared his throat with a rumbling sound. "You are crazy, why, Hunter has been with me for three years. He's like one of the family. Why, I think he's going to marry my daughter."

"No," said Margaret Gilcris, looking directly at Costa. "No," she took a deep breath as if this was very important. "I'm not going to marry him. Maybe I thought so once, but now, no."

Hunter hadn't said anything. His very silence should have warned Costa.

Costa smiled. "You know I have you. You've guessed that I checked back on your record. You probably missed those tax forms and know that I got the prints from them."

"Go on," said Hunter. "Where did I slip?"

"One word," said Costa, "one little word. You were talking about prison and you said stir, a little word which will probably send you to the chair. Stir is good slang, anyone might use it, but few people do. I didn't expect to hear it from a fancy private secretary, so, I started thinking. Lippy Larry was blackmailing someone in this house. The natural supposition was the Gilcris boy, the next bet was the old man," he said speaking of Gilcris as if he weren't there. "Then the blonde, and finally mamma who amuses herself by

reading detective fiction and who might just possibly have dreamed up some screwy thing which she wished to keep quiet.

"But you were here in the house too, pal. You were a confidential secretary, in a spot to maybe make big money. It must have been quite an unpleasant shock when Roy Gilcris brought Lippy Larry home and you recognized your old Folsom cellmate and knew he had recognized you."

"It was," said Hunter.

"So Lippy put the arm on you for dough. You paid, but you planned then to knock him over sometime and if you could discredit young Gilcris at the same time, then marry the girl, you'd be in clover."

"You're smart."

"No," said Costa, "just human. If I weren't so damned honest, I might think up something like that myself."

Hunter smiled for the first time. "Then you'll understand why I'm doing this. I could argue about whether you could prove anything in court. . ."

**THAT'S** why I brought Tinkloe," said Costa. "Lippy Larry talked to Tinkloe. He didn't tell him who you were but he said that he'd found an old cell-mate, put the arm on him and was collecting plenty."

Hunter sighed. He took out the gun he'd been holding inside his pocket. "Don't make me kill all of you. I'm going to take the girl with me. I'm going to lock you all in that closet. You'll burst out of course, but if you try to give the alarm, I'll take care of her. If you give me a break, she gets clear, understand?"



## THIRTEEN SHROUDS

Headliner Files, Inc., specialized in the perambulations of the prominent, but sometimes they relaxed their rules and followed the foibles of some very unusual nobodies—like the hasn't-been prizefighter and the non-struggling young playwright who came

to such spectacular ends. Official verdict: "Accidental death"—but Thackeray Hackett called it murder. He called a lot more shots before the case was closed—and stopped a couple aimed at him, by swinging his dandified but deadly little hickory cane with dire results. Come along for the fast and fatal fun in **FREDERICK C. DAVIS'** latest "Thack" Hackett novelette.

Most slayers are as blunt as their instruments, but in the case of the cock-eyed laundryman, the killer used a magician's bag of tricks as a very effective means to an end—someone else's. Still, Jeffery Wren, that ponderous prestidigitator, was on to every hop, skip and bump-off. Read all about it in *Feather Your Coffin*, by **G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**.

Also: A tough, tense yarn by **TED STRATTON** about a not-quite fool-proof insurance racket; and **ED SCHMID** has written *A Like-ly Story*—plus other exciting shorts—that add up to a great October issue of **DIME DETECTIVE**.



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Costa shrugged. "It looks as if you win."  
"I always win," said Hunter. "I'll take your car. It's faster than mine. The keys please."

Costa gave him the keys. He turned around while Hunter emptied his pockets. He said to the girl, "Go with him quietly. I don't think he'll hurt you. If he does, I'll personally hunt him down."

The closet was small and dark and very stuffy. Costa said, "If I'd known this was going to happen I'd never have brought a fat man with me." He was talking to Tinkloe. "There isn't room for all of us. Throw out your stomach and split the door."

Tinkloe said, "You didn't need me. You didn't even have to bluff him with that lie about what Lippy Larry told me."

"I didn't know that," Costa said. "I didn't know Hunter was smart enough to see the game was up. Most crooks aren't."

Gilchrist exploded. "Are you going to stand here arguing while my daughter's in danger? Do something, you fool."

Costa used his foot to kick out the lower panel. The noise brought the butler. Costa brushed past him into the hall, just in time to see the hall door open and Margaret Gilchrist come in. She was followed by the hairless man. Gordon looked at Costa with smoldering eyes.

"You louse," he said. "Making me help with your act. You knew I was waiting, out behind your car."

"I hoped you were," said Costa.

"I slugged him," said Gordon. "I thought it was you."

"I hoped you would," Costa went out and looked at the secretary. He was out cold. Costa dragged him to a tree, wrapped his arms about it and slipped the bracelets on his wrists. Then he went into the phone and called headquarters.

When he came back from the phone he told Gilchrist, "Kline will be right out to grab the glory."

The blonde said, "How soon will they free Roy?"

"As soon as I get to the precinct."

"I'll ride down with you."

"No," said Costa. He was looking at Gordon.

"I'm going." She went out and got into the car. Costa went out slowly. Gordon was at his shoulder. On the terrace Costa stopped. He pulled a handkerchief from his hip pocket. He put one corner of it between his teeth. He pulled out the gun he'd recovered from Hunter.

His words were fuzzy because of the handkerchief, but they were plain enough. "How's your nerve, Gordon?"

"Better than yours," said Gordon.

"I don't think it is," said Costa. "Get out your gun."

"Huh!" Gordon was caught off base.

I said, "Get out your gun. Take the other end of this handkerchief and hold it in your teeth. We'll see how good your famous nerve is."

"A fine thing," said Gordon. "The place will be crawling with cops in a few minutes."

"We'll shoot each other in the belly," said Costa. "It hurts like hell, I'm told, but you don't die right away. I'll probably live long enough to explain to Kline that you shot in self-defense and also that you helped with Hunter. If you live, they'll probably give you a medal, but even if you live, you probably will not walk. This gun of mine handles a big slug. It's liable to crack your spine."

The hairless man was sweating. "You wouldn't dare."

"Grab the end of the handkerchief and find out."

Gordon didn't grab it. He turned away, cursing, climbed into his car and shot out of the drive, his spinning tires throwing gravel.

The girl was sitting in the blue convertible. She'd heard it all. "You, you didn't really mean to go through with it."

Costa shrugged as he helped her in. "I don't know. I'd as leave have my guts blown out as go around ducking Gordon the rest of my life."

"But won't he come back?"

"He'll blow town," said Costa. "The one thing a man like that respects is nerve. I backed him down. He wouldn't want me to meet him. I think we've seen Gordon for the last time." He was silent all the way to the station. When he got there he took the girl in and told the desk sergeant to release her brother, then he went into the detective bureau.

Applegate looked up and yawned. "You still around?"

Costa said he was just checking out.

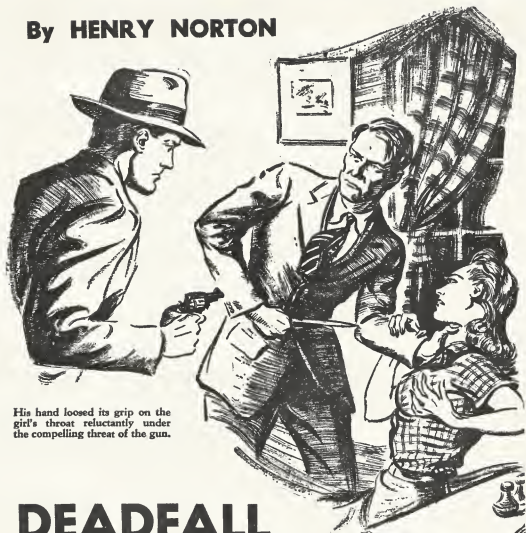
Applegate shook his head.

He watched Costa clear his desk, then followed him to the door. Margaret Gilchrist was waiting in the hall. She said, "I sent Roy home in a cab. I thought you'd drive me. I want to talk to you alone."

Applegate's eyes bugged a little. He opened his slack mouth to make a crack, caught Costa's eye and shut it slowly. They went out and down the worn stone steps together. The two glass bulbs burned brightly, marking the station in a new glow. Costa helped her into the car, then slid under the wheel. He was suddenly tired. It had been a long day. But the car ran fine. It made him feel good. It always made him feel that way to drive a good car and have a blonde at his side.

THE END

By HENRY NORTON



His hand loosed its grip on the girl's throat reluctantly under the compelling threat of the gun.

## DEADFALL

HE STOOD with his heels no more than a foot from the building, and not once while he was there did his shoulders relax against the wall. He stood easily balanced, arms quiet at his side. His head was tipped back, his eyes fixed on some distant point.

Five o'clock came, five-thirty, and a thin rain fell. Crowds filled the street, thinned and came again. A policeman in a white raincoat, huge and shapeless, worked his way down the street with a bit of colored chalk on a stick, marking the tires of parked cars. He saw the quiet man by the building and came over.

"O'Dell!" he said. "Glad to see you back, boy!"



*Sam O'Dell knew that with Myra, things had to be different. . . . So the first gift he sent her was her husband—fresh from Sing Sing—whose hands were aching for her throat!*

The man said, "I'm working."

The patrolman backed two steps, then turned with a suggestion of haste and went on. Sam O'Dell continued to stand quietly. Working could mean a number of things, Sam thought idly. It could mean the bloody alley where Hodie Fenner and his boys had elected to make their stand. It could mean reading down through an endless stack of reports, until they began to make sense or they didn't, and the chances were about even. Or it could mean a vigil like this, waiting for a light to come on.

At six a window of the building opposite bloomed suddenly into a pale oblong of yellowish light. O'Dell threaded through the crowd to the intersection, and behind him the rain took only a moment to cover the two dry spots where his feet had stood.

He waited for the light to change, crossed the busy intersection without allowing his big shoulders to touch anyone in the crowds around him, and walked a half block to the entrance of an apartment building. Not a very fancy place—a four story brownstone converted to flats. He went up the stairs to the fourth floor, crossed to one of the three doors on that level, and thudded gently on the door with the heel of his hand.

There was no answer.

He twisted the knob gently both ways, and it was locked as he expected it. He hadn't intended walking in anyway. He was just announcing that he wasn't going to leave until the door opened.

Steps came to the door then, softly.

A girl said, "Who is it?"

He said, "Sam O'Dell."

Silence, and a little pause before the key rattled in the lock and the door swung to the small limit of the night chain. He could see one side of her face, and it was as he had remembered it during those thirty-five days; white skin almost luminous in contrast to her dark hair, eyes tight-skinned and questioning. She looked at him.

He said, "We can't talk here."

The door went shut. He could sense the effort it cost her to release the night chain. He went through the door and closed it behind him.

She stood facing him, her hands made into small fists at her sides. He came to the middle of the room, and she backed away as if a wall of force in front of him had pushed, her steps matching his. When he stopped beneath the glaring drop light in the center of the room, she was backed against the wall, and her palms were pressed against the wall at her sides.

"I came to tell you I made a mistake," he said.

His face was partly in shadow. The light was unkind to the thinning brown hair close-

cropped to his skull, but the highlights on nose and cheeks gave a mask of youth and shine to a face in which there was no longer youth—in which there was only a great weariness and a sort of rock-hewn determination.

He went on quickly, for he did not want an answer. "We try not to make mistakes, because they're apt to hurt. But with one guy doing two jobs, it can happen. It did—to me. I made a mistake on Carl Slade."

The name shook her like a slap in the face, but still she did not speak.

"We try to cross-check on those things," Sam O'Dell said. "Send two guys maybe, so we can get two angles. I sent one—all I could spare. So I ran it through that way, and Slade got the book. So it was my mistake. and I thought I should tell you."

He looked at her with no expression.

"He gets out tomorrow," he said.

One of her hands came up to cover her mouth, palm outward. One tiny sound came from her lips; a sound bitten in two as her teeth clamped into her knuckles. Sam O'Dell heard the first murmur, heard its death, and was well content.

He turned with a suggestion of carelessness—a casual gesture of his hand, as though she had reacted in a perfectly normal fashion. He went to the door and turned. She had not moved.

"He'll probably get in around five tomorrow," he said. "If there's anything I can do, let me know."

He closed the door softly behind him.

**D**ARKNESS was in the streets below, and passing cars spun ribbons of white and red along the glistening street as they passed. O'Dell stood a moment in the apartment entrance, and then went across the sidewalk to where a man lounged on the shadowed side of a telephone pole.

"A blind man couldn't miss you, Mason," he said.

Mason's face showed astonishment.

"Slade ain't even out yet," he said.

"Myra Slade's upstairs now," said O'Dell. "His wife?" said Mason.

Sam rode over the question roughly. "The stakeout starts now, understand? Try to use your head. Report in every hour, and I'll send you a relief at midnight."

Sullenly, Mason said, "Yes, sir."

Sam O'Dell went down the street, his movements powerful and unhurried. He seemed to be walking more slowly than most of the people he overtook. He went into the Hall, back to a small office, and took off his sodden hat and coat. Ike Patterson came in at once.

Without turning, Sam asked, "All set?"

Patterson flopped in a chair and drummed on the desk top with his fingers. His eyes

darted upward to O'Dell, and down to study his own shoes.

"Yeah," he said. "All set."

He waited till Sam sat down at the desk, then flashed him a white smile in which his eyes did not join.

"I hope to God you know what you're doin'."

Sam said, "You think I don't?"

Patterson said, "My God, Sam, your tail's in a sling from here to Singapore if this thing backfires! You know that as well's I do!"

"It won't backfire."

"I'd like to think so!" Patterson got up and paced the floor, a worried little man in a wrinkled gray suit, a bright-eyed little man with perfect teeth and a quick smile. The teeth were false. Most often, so was the smile.

He turned and leveled a lean finger on Sam.

"Slade's a killer and you know it! Not counting the angle you're workin' on, you know he's a killer from the Carmody business, because he copped a plea on that one and got away with it!"

"So he's a killer," said Sam.

"You're springin' him!"

"He isn't in for murder—yet."

Ike Patterson stared at Sam O'Dell with something like fascination in his eyes. "You don't care what kind of a goat you stake in your deadfalls, do you, bud?"

Sam looked at him, and there was reproof in his look, no anger—nothing but a great tiredness and a great self-possession.

"The goat doesn't seem to be very important," he said, "so long as you get the tiger."

And his thoughts were gone then. Away to a nameless place on a nameless map in a finished but not very conclusive war. Where the bait was a real live goat, but the quarry was human.

Starving Japs in the jungle around—he remembered it all now, and it was none too pleasant thinking—and a thin file of Marines with orders to take over the area. What could it be but deception and murder? The Nips'd come to the chance of fresh, edible meat, he remembered, like buzzards to carrion. And it was the buzzard's turn next, for the carefully hidden BAR's, the well-placed grenade throwers, had taken all the humans who rose to the bait. Done it again and again until the forest was purged and purified, and the company was going again. A hell of a thing to think about. The girl was wide-eyed and scared and lovely, but the bait was the same—quivering flesh that would pull the quarry in front of a rifle.

Ike said, "Anyway, he's sprung."

"Then you know your orders," said Sam O'Dell. "There's a window across the court

that looks in. The apartment belongs to a Mrs. Cavanaugh. Tell her to sit still and shut up, and stay there from four on tomorrow with a good rifle. I mean get a 6.5 Mannlicher, Ike, or a Springfield. I don't want any fiddling—I want heavy loads where it'll do the most good."

Ike said, "Big game guns!"

"Do what I say," Sam told him.

"You're really after tiger!"

"You think I'm not?" Sam said.

He was silent, and Ike Patterson said no more, recognizing his mood. The mood that had come on him more often of late, a cold, not quite bitter aloofness.

He said, now, in a listless sort of voice, "She knew he was guilty as hell!"

"Then your story must've gone over big."

"Slade swiped a squad car, drove it one block and smashed it up against a retaining wall; then stood there smelling like a brewery, waiting to be arrested. Hell, it was open and shut." O'Dell was talking to himself as much as to Patterson.

Ike said, "Then where do you get off with this stuff about makin' a mistake? She knows you're lyin'!"

"I did make a mistake," Sam said.

He moved his hands a little on the scarred desk.

"I jailed him," he said, "when he should've hung."

Now there was only waiting ahead; an enduring of the time that must pass before the trap could spring. It was not so difficult as it once might have been. Finally, you learned to wait, or you went crazy.

Mason called every hour, but there was nothing much to his reports. Myra Slade had come out and gone to the corner delicatessen. More food than she needed, Mason had itemized, and several quarts of beer. Then back to the apartment. Sam O'Dell grinned. Somebody else was waiting too. His grin stopped short, and he scowled. Waiting, perhaps for death!

Mason's report reminded him of his missed dinner, and he had food sent to the office. He ate everything meticulously, and leaned back to wait. A time or two he dozed, and the phone roused him. At midnight he sent Kincaid to relieve Mason.

Morning found him red-eyed, a little more tired than he'd been, but ready for what might come. The trouble, or the implication of trouble, began with Chief Halloran's visit to the little office.

The luminous dial of Sam's wrist watch said eight-thirty.

Halloran came in waving a handful of papers. He was Irish as the map of Galway. He was big, and he was just at present in an icy rage.

WHY does this all happen as soon as I go home?" he demanded. "If you've got to turn people loose from the penitentiary, why don't you do it while I'm here?"

Sam O'Dell looked at him sleepily.

"You wouldn't have let me," he said.

"You're everlastingly right I wouldn't!" stormed the chief. "O'Dell, have you taken leave of your senses, turning Carl Slade loose? You know he's a bad one. We took the one chance we had of putting him behind bars, and now you, takin' things in your own hands, release him!"

"That's right," said Sam O'Dell.

"And why?"

"I'm going to hang him."

Halloran looked at the tired, unresponsive man with a look of complete frustration. Anger he could feel; he could respond to hate of horror or revenge. But he knew no way to penetrate the steely indifference of this man.

Soberly, he said, "You could hang yourself!"

"That's a chance I'll take," Sam said.

The chief said, "You got something to go on?"

"Nothing much, an idea maybe."

"Is there gonna be trouble?"

Sam O'Dell shrugged.

"You got any help on this?"

"Some. Enough."

Halloran stared at him, and then lifted his hands palm outward in a gesture that was a curious blend of rejection, and acceptance. He turned to go, and over his shoulder he said:

"Let me know if you need anything."

Sam O'Dell sucked in a long breath. So he was playing a long shot—maybe too long. But it wasn't often in this business that a man got time to think, and thinking sometimes led to surprising results.

Certainly a man could ask no better time for thought than the thirty-five days it took a wallowing transport to go from Bombay to Seattle. And since it was the end of the army and the return to the old life, you thought about the job you were going back to. Or you tried to.

It was then that Sam had found himself remembering the face of Myra Slade. He thought of it vaguely at first, as one of the pale, constant blurs that had been in the courtroom when Carl Slade was on trial for stealing and wrecking a police car.

And then it had begun to be important, remembering her, though he did not know why. The troopship ploughed its way around Singapore and up the China Sea, and the crap games diminished in number and increased in size, and Sam O'Dell leaned on the rail and saw in the curdled whiteness of the

ship's wake the face of a girl, luminous below masses of dark hair. And finally, because there was in him no ability to compromise, he knew why she was important, and how she fitted into his job.

For there was fear in her face as he had seen it all through the trial, and that was natural enough. But on the last day, when the jury had come in with a verdict that sent Carl Slade to prison for five years, the fear had fled, to be replaced by a sudden draining relief.

Nothing like a sea voyage for getting your thinking done, he'd told himself. The days, like a vacuum, had to fill themselves. So random and pointless a recollection could never have edged itself into the crowded hours of police routine. It had lain dormant, like a planted seed, until time came for it to grow.

But it had been the patient pursuit of routine investigation that had done the rest. He'd gone through a day or two of welcome on the force, getting his sea legs worn off, accustoming himself to the feel of the gun under his arm and the sap in his back pocket, to the feel of hard concrete under his feet. Then he'd gone to work.

It hadn't been spectacular. Desk diaries of the Slade case told nothing. Newspaper files began to shed a little more light on it. And finally, like the slow trial-and-error fitting of jigsaw parts, a pattern began to emerge, and after a while it was not pattern, but a clear and certain picture. A picture nobody would believe but Sam O'Dell.

Not that I was simple enough to try it on anybody, he thought. If I know anything, I know what's evidence. But there's a way to prove it, if you don't mind being a heel to the girl you've been thinking about across the whole damn' Pacific ocean.

And he told himself, "She's Slade's wife, you dope. She's up to her lovely ears in the dirtiest kind of a job. Since when have you started feeling sorry for criminals?"

Sitting at the marred desk in the tiny office, letting all this run through his mind, Sam O'Dell felt old and tired. There was nothing to do now but let it run out as he'd planned. Carl Slade would be free in a few hours, in town in a few more. And what Slade did then would tell.

His phone tinkled and he answered it before it completed the first ring. A girl's soft voice asked for Detective O'Dell.

He said, "This's O'Dell."

"Myra Slade," she said. "About—about Carl—did you say he'd be here about five this afternoon?"

"That's pretty close."

"Is it—a parole or anything?"

"Oh, no," Sam O'Dell assured her. "It isn't a parole—it's an outright discharge. You won't have a thing to worry about."



His tones were hearty and reassuring, but his face was a mask, skin tight-drawn across the heavy bones of his face.

She hesitated a moment, and asked, "Will he be able to get this address through anybody at—down there? You see, I've moved since he—"

"Oh, yes," said Sam. "We already gave him the address. We want to do everything we can to make it up to him."

Faintly, she said, "Thank you."

He sat and stared at the humming phone.

SO NOW she's had time to think," he said to himself. "And she's come up with the same answer I've got. And she's scared, poor chick, as well she might be. Scared of me, and scared of Slade, and probably scared of life itself. Well, O'Dell, isn't that the way you wanted it? Would she be any use to you if she weren't scared?"

Ike Patterson came in, and some of yesterday's worries had been smoothed by sleep, but there was a new crop growing rapidly. He slumped in a chair and stared bitterly at Sam.

"I suppose you know just how little time you've got," he said.

"How so?"

"The warden didn't even want to release Slade for questioning. He's gonna check up and find the guy's been turned clear loose, and then he's gonna raise pure hell."

"So how much time does that make?"

"I don't know the deadline. But I know there's one comin', sure as God made little apples. Just watch yourself, that's all."

"Tke," Sam said, "I'll watch myself."

"Watch this too," said Patterson. "Carl Slade is no dummy. He'll know you didn't have any right to have him released, and that you're the one who can send him back, and the first thing he'll do when he's out is make sure he can't be sent back."

"How?"

"By blasting you, first off."

Sam shook his head.

"Blasting, but not me."

Ike thought about that for a space of time, and his eyes matched the tenseness in O'Dell's. He said at length, "You think a Mannlicher's okay?"

"With a Mannlicher it's like a torpedo—even a near miss can do the work."

Ike grinned. "The wind knocks 'em down."

Sam did not answer the grin, for he was thinking what a high-powered rifle could do to a man, and he was thinking what it could do to a man's wife to watch it happen. It might not happen, of course, but if he'd made the right guess on Carl Slade it would, or something just as bad. There was an audacity about the man—born perhaps of desperation,

but audacity none the less—that made him a dangerous, unpredictable figure. Whatever he did would be well done, and it was up to Sam to match his moves. Up to Sam, and Ike, and the Mannlicher.

And there was more waiting. Sometimes, like now, it seemed to Sam that he had been waiting all his life, that there had been nothing but waiting even in the slash and drive of his most active moments. His past conflict with crime, the Japs—all this was but a somehow projected part of the endless hours of waiting. But the thing about it was it got you finally to the thing you waited for. It got Sam O'Dell to four o'clock.

Then Mason called his report.

"The woman just got home," he said. "Left her job two hours early. She don't look so good."

"What do you mean?"

"Aw, she's jumpy as a cat," Mason said.

"There for a while I thought she'd got wise to me followin' her, but she was just shyin' away from shadows."

"I'll be right over," Sam said.

He put one .38 in his shoulder clip and another in the pocket of his overcoat. In five minutes he was climbing the narrow stairs of the old brownstone house. There was a service closet on the third floor, where it commanded a view of the stairs. He shoved aside pails and brooms and closed the door so that only a tiny slit was left through which to observe the hall. He crouched there, waiting while the shadows deepened.

At almost total dark a gray-whiskered janitor trudged up the steps and turned on a feeble light in the center of the corridor. Sam heard him do the same on the floor above. Other residents of the building straggled in as the hour wore on toward six. Somewhere in the building a radio came to life with a giant voice that alternated resounding words with deafening music. O'Dell cursed the radio's owner savagely.

Carl Slade came up the stairs at seven. He was taller than Sam O'Dell, quick in his movements. He wore a good-looking gray hat well down over his eyes. His face was well-fleshed and ruddy, and Sam reflected idly what modern penal method had done detectives a disservice when it did away with the traditional prison pallor.

Slade saw the open slit of the broom closet door, and hesitated in midstride. It was Sam's impression that the man saw every tiny detail in the hall in one sweeping glance—camera-eyed by strain, printing impressions on the quick film of his mind. For an instant it seemed as if Slade would come over to investigate. Then he half-shrugged, and went on up to the fourth floor.

(Continued on page 94)



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Beeootiful Broad

THE MATINEE was dull. On the outskirts of Skokum it was hot enough and the kids were prowling the lot like eager little monkeys, ogling the ballys and the spreads and taking in everything free, maybe springing for a bite at the grease joint or a bottle of pink, but otherwise strictly from Dixie. The Little Doc got into his powerful big Cadillac, the one which hauled his trailer-home about the country, and drove quickly to town.

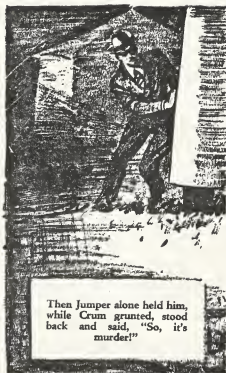
The Southwest was like all the rest of the country these days, he thought glumly, as he cruised along Main Street, looking for the sheriff's office. You paid off local law and ran wide open or they suspected you of everything in the world. He remembered the sheriff here from last year, a fat politico named Crum, a cognomen Little Doc thought appropriate.

There was a courthouse and beside it a sort of ground floor office in a row of the same, and Crum's name was on a window. Doc parked the Cad and climbed out from beneath the wheel. He was shorter than most men, and bigger. He had shoulders like a wrestler, a waist like a ballet dancer and tiny feet of which he was extremely vain. He had biceps measuring seventeen and a half inches and dainty hands which could straighten horseshoes. His face was craggy and he was not young, but he was elastic and smooth in motion.

He went into the sheriff's office and a deputy lounged, picking his teeth. This man's name was Jumper and he had been a city cop and was very tough and surly. He growled, "Who you?"

Doc said gently, "I am Doc, from the Porten American Shows. I'd like to see the Sheriff."

The door to an inner office opened and an obese, bugle-nosed man with tiny eyes set close enough to his nose to appear crossed called, "That you, Doc?"



Then Jumper alone held him,  
while Crum grunted, stood  
back and said, "So, it's  
murder!"

# CARNIVAL



A "Little Doc" Novelette

By JOEL REEVE

*Little Doc kept his shows together by squaring all beefs and mothering the whole Carney—even down to the roustabouts. In tough years this made the difference between success and failure. But this was the toughest year Doc would ever know, for never before had a police chief—and a right gee like Sandy Sandell, at that—been shivved to death right on his own doorstep!*



Jumper said unpleasantly, "I like the Greater White Way Shows."

Crum chuckled and stepped aside. Doc went into the office. It was very well furnished for a small county seat office. Crum said, "Jumper's a tough critter."

Doc watched the big man sit down behind the mahogany desk. He remained standing, clinging to a shred of dignity. These scenes he hated most of all. He said, "Don't kid me, Crum. Greater White Way gives out those fine souvenir programs; they run a graft show. They carry dips, shell men, the whole crooked works. On account of Greater White Way Shows we have to play out of town lots. It costs me thousands every time I crawl behind Greater White Way."

"They never done no harm here," said Crum placidly. He folded fat hands on his belly and grinned. He was enjoying himself, Doc knew.

Doc said flatly, "I know those programs he hands you. With the hundred dollar bill in the slit arranged for it. Crum, I am running a Sunday School show. I can't steal a hundred dollars from someone's pocket and make it up. Greater White Way takes that much crooked money from your constituents in a day."

Sheriff Crum said amusedly, "Why Doc, you must be mistaken. I find them folks very nice."

Doc said grimly, "I know you do." He took out some bills from a wallet. He threw them on the desk with a gesture of supreme contempt. "I'll pony up. I know you'll keep the bad mouth on me if I don't. There is your hundred—but I'm damned if I'll wrap it in a pretty package. So-long, Crum." He walked out of the office, past the still sneering Jumper and got into his car. He had not failed to see the wrath in Crum's eyes, but he could not restrain himself sometimes in situations like this. He drove around the corner to Police Headquarters and paused as a short, nervous, sandy-haired man in plain clothes stepped to the curbing and spoke with him.

**D**OC said tightly, "I just paid off your sheriff. I'm running the cleanest show in the country, Sandell. If you don't believe me, come out and prow!"

Sandell, Chief of Police of Skokum, said, "If you had a city permit, I could throw him off the lot. But he's talked the mayor out of givin' city permits to shows. That lets him collect the graft, see?"

Doc said, "Oh, the hell with it! Come out and see the show. On me, Sandy."

"Thanks, Doc. You're all right." The Chief grinned and went on. Doc drove back to the lot. He went into the trailer and took

his vitamin pill. He was vaguely worried about a slight pain in his chest—but he was always worried about his health when he was sober.

He hadn't been on a toot in some time, now. The show had been paying off well and he had a stack of currency in the steel box under the bunk in the trailer. He pulled the venetian blinds, closed up tight and took out the box. He was always moving it, indeed he painted it different colors and used it for a bread box, a catch-all and even a sewing basket at various times. He was under the quaint illusion that he thus concealed the real use of this container, which had a not-so-secret false bottom. Now he placed it in plain sight, on the radio cabinet and listened to a program.

After that he showered in the little room at the end of the big trailer. Dressing in a white pongee shirt, dark trousers, an ascot and a loose-fitting double-breasted coat, he looked distinguished, even dignified with the hair greying at his temples. He went onto the lot and found Joey, the young lad who drove his platform trailer and acted as general handy man. Joey would never take the place of Slick Durkin, his former boy, but was a strong, willing youth with loyalty to spare for the Little Doc, whom he adored. He put Joey to piling the square, brilliant-hued boxes of Home Remedy where they would be convenient on the back platform of the other trailer. He checked his lighting system, his throat-speaker, the colored maps showing man's most intimate internal secrets.

Joey, a fattish lad with pendulous lips, said from his task of piling the merchandise which made Doc a fairly rich man, "You see the broad?"

Doc said with distaste, "Do you mean 'woman,' Joey?"

"Yeah. A beecootiful broad." Joey's lips were moist, his eye brimming. "She ast fer you, too!"

Doc said sharply, "I don't want to interview any woman, now or any other time. I've told you a dozen times."

Joey said, "Sure. On'y this one was no carney broad. She wore a suit-like. Nob-by. . ."

Doc said, "Look what you're doing there. And sweep out my trailer when you are finished."

It was the supper hour and the show was practically stopped. Only the ferris wheel went lazily up and over and around, and the sound of the carousel came through thinly, like a dirge. The carney folk were in the crumb castle, or lounging about, catching a rest from their labors, fanning the breeze. Doc went past the big Venus In Soapsuds tent where the act which was the main at-

traction of the Porten Shows was housed. The woman came out from behind a flap and approached him, smiling.

He paused, frowning. His misogyny was deep-set, as much a part of him as his hypochondria. Women had been a nuisance to him for many years, except when he was drunk and the fever was on him. This woman with her neat figure, dressed in tweeds with a filmy blouse, her make-up not too ornate, was a potential liability, he saw at a glance.

She said, "My name is Joan Clausen. I've worked road shows and I'd like a chance in your act."

She had green eyes and she was not too young. There were crow's feet at the corners of her eyes and she smiled easily and with practice, using only her lips. She waited his answer with too much assurance.

He said, "The show is full. Sorry."

She frowned. "Abe says he can use me, Doc. What's the idea of brushing me off so quick?"

He sighed. "You are one of those smart girls. You know the show is fat, you know I do not like women. So you go to Abe. Then you think you can con me, so you give me the old come-on. If Abe wants you, he will hire you. Don't bother me, Miss Clausen, please." He walked by her, so close he could have touched her, his eyes straight ahead. She fell back, honestly astonished.

He went all the way around the lot, past the geek tent, around the front of the show and then to his own lay-out. A few people were trickling in. He had the spot near the entrance, but to one side, almost as though he were not a part of the carney. He mounted his platform, which was a tail gate let down from the plain blue trailer Joey drove. The flood light limned him and made him seem taller. Like magic people drifted around to stare up at his impassive face.

He began talking quietly and the speaker strung about his neck sent his persuasive voice just far enough to shill the suckers entering the grounds. Darkness fell gently on the scene. He always worked the evening show before he ate and he was in good voice tonight.

"**L**ADIES and gentlemen, this, of course, is a health lecture. Everyone has health. It may be good health. It may be poor health. But we all have it. . . ."

He became a good-humored doctor, lecturing the home folks. His simple language, his careful repetition of the word "health," his refusal to mention diseases or frightening medical terms won them immediately—it always had. By the time Joey, acting as stick, bought the first box of the panacea known as Home Remedy, they were crowding to

purchase his wares and to speak with him. He escaped with difficulty, and went groaning to the bicarbonate in his trailer.

He reached to switch on the radio and knew something was wrong. He had unlocked the door to enter, but someone else had been here. He stared at the floor, but it was unswept, which was Joey all over. Nevertheless, the steel box had been moved.

He picked it up, careful to use a cloth, gingerly managing it by the edges so as not to spoil fingerprints. The lock had been forced—no easy trick. The false bottom had not fooled the thief. The bundle of cash was gone.

Doc put the box back on the radio as he had found it. He got out the powder and the other paraphernalia and patiently dusted the box. After two minutes he knew that the thief had wiped the box clean of prints. He replaced it on the radio and sat down on his bunk.

He had lost a large sum of money, but it did not occur to him to call the police, or any other aid. He sat quite still, thinking. Then he arose, turned out the lights, took a flashlight and examined the lock of the trailer door. It too had been forced. He shrugged and did not even bother to question Joey. He adjusted the set of his ascot tie and walked slowly toward the midway.

\* \* \*

The Doc was short enough, but far too wide to be inconspicuous except in a tight crowd. He kept moving along among some semi-drunken youths until he was inside the Venus In Soapsuds show and as he passed the hoarse-voiced Abe the Barker tipped him the wink that something was awry. Abe would put it out to the carneys in a second. Inside, Doc leaned against a tent pole, watching the show.

It was a quickie, of course, grinding out twenty, thirty a day. The great promises of Abe were scarcely realized, the girls wearing more than they would have on a bathing beach, except in the soapsuds scene, when the principals really came close to stripping amidst the thick, foamy chemical which concealed them to the extent of the average local law.

There was a noise at the flap and Doc saw Jumper come in. Sheriff Crum followed a moment later, guffawing at some remark he had made to Abe. Abe's snarl was unpleasant to hear. The two lawmen stood gawking at the girls. The bubble finish came and Doc started at sight of the new girl.

Then he saw that she really had it, and that Abe had not been mistaken in putting her in as a principal. She had the big time manner, without the hippy jiggling which the average carney girl thought alluring. She

gave just enough to put it over and in the few seconds allotted the feature, she knocked them over in the aisles. The applause and whistling was for her, there was no question about it, and she knew how to hog it, too.

Dolores Fanchon, a statuesque brunette who had hitherto been featured, could not stop this new girl. Her flashing, dark eyes and the claw-like movement of her hands as the curtain swung to before them was not lost on Doc. He had known it would be something like this when he saw Joan Clausen. She spelled trouble with a capital T. He shrugged and wheeled to go on with his trek about the lot.

A small man was pawing at the Sheriff, hopping on one foot, declamatory, angry. Doc paused and listened. The man squawked like Donald Duck, "Twenty-five dollars, Crum! Right outa my pocket. You got t' do somethin', Sheriff. By dam, Hob Miller lost thutty bucks at that other carnival. Now I get my pocket picked for twenty-five. You think money grows on trees, Crum? Huh? You leave these shows run and respectable citizens gits their pocket picked. . . ."

The fat Sheriff chuckled. "You want me to tell your wife where you got your pocket picked, Lemuel? And that you seen the last five shows 'thout leavin' the tent? I'll have a look for your wallet, Lem, but don't holler fer my scalp. I can't help it if a crook sneaks into a crowd. I warn yawl to watch your money every time a carnival comes to town. . . ."

Juniper towering, bulky, hands like hams shoved into his pockets, lounged out the door indolently indifferent. The ex-city cop was an unpleasant character, Doc thought grimly. Crum salved the indignant citizen, easing him out of the tent. Doc gnawed at a fingernail. Crum brushed at the lapels of the victim of the pickpocket, rubbing out a white mark which may have been powder. Doc wondered for a moment if the local yokel had actually sneaked backstage. . . .

He went about the lot very carefully, looking now for thieves and dips. He thought he knew them all. They worked the carneys or the circuses in pairs, usually, and from Charlie Drew down, Doc was familiar with them. It was necessary that he know them—his show would be ruined if they got past him unnoticed. If there were crooks on the lot he had to know about it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Head of John Law

**H**HE QUESTIONED Gert, the Bearded Lady, who knew every one in the business for sure. She shook her head. "Nope.

If I seen one, I'd of told you. When we run a Sunday School show, we gotta keep it that way."

Gert, being a freak, was scarcely a woman to Doc, although she had had three husbands. He said to her, "I paid off, so far as that goes. But we're being jobbed, and someone pinched my poke."

Gert whistled through her luxurious whiskers. "Your whole wad? Damn me!" Doc said, "Keep your eye out and pass the word."

He did not speak to anyone else except Abe. The barker said, "On my show a guy got clipped? But there wasn't no dip in sight!" Then he said slowly, "But Charlie Drew is with White Way. Him an' his mob. They could've left a new gee behind. One nobody knows."

Doc said, "That's what I've been thinking." Charlie Drew was almost fabulous. He was ancient in sin, he had been organizing pickpockets for two generations. His light-fingered gentry could steal gold teeth without interrupting a victim's conversation, it was said. Drew was a Fagin and countless dips had graduated from his school. Doc thought of the new woman on the Soap-Suds show.

There was no use saying anything about her to Abe, he knew. The broken-nosed old rummy was woman-mad. He would tip the girl off and she would disappear and that would be that. Doc would still be without his dough and he would never know who picked the local Clem's pocket.

Of course the woman did not actually get her hand into the man's jeans. She was on-stage. That was not the way these characters worked. Doc knew. An innocent-seeming new one, a recruit from Drew's gang, could easily do the actual lifting of the skin. It was not the dip who was dangerous—because no dip ever lived, despite fanciful tales to the contrary, who could work without a partner or some strong distraction, or without benefit of a dense crowd.

It was the woman, then, he needed to watch. He groaned, thinking of the sales of Home Remedy he was missing through this detective work which he despised in part—and enjoyed in another detached, cynical way. He padded about behind the tents and the roustabouts grinned at him. The muscle men loved him because he could swing a sledge better than any of them and his strength of arm was legendary among carney folk.

He thought about Charlie Drew and how the old crook would love to drop a couple of operators in Skokum to ruin Doc. He had thrown Drew off the lot early in the season and had caught several of his gang in

previous seasons and done the same to them. The ancient scoundrel hated Doc and the Porten Show.

The woman now, was brand new and a dangerous worker at that. She had certainly been on the big wheel at one time or another. Doc, who had been on the top time in quite another field in his day, sighed despite himself. He always had a smidgin of sympathy for a good one who had slipped . . . even a female. If, twenty years ago, he had not lost his license to practice medicine, who knew what he might have attained?

He set his slightly prognathous jaw and continued his dark way, out of sight of the Clems and Judys who were flocking to the midway. Even the larry peddler was selling his globular rubber wares like mad tonight. The Sheriff, by appearing himself and taking the bad mouth off, had put over the show, all right. Doc's hundred had done its work. He made a wry face at the thought that Crum might as well have got it as the thief who rifled the steel box in the trailer.

He had completed the circle now and was behind the Venus In Soap-Suds tent. This was where the pickpocket had operated, this was where the girl had worked distracting the victim. This should be the spot to watch.

He eased over a guy rope and put his well-shod small foot down on something which was not certain ground. He leaped sideways as though a rattler had sounded. His hand went to the flashlight in his pocket.

He held his breath, following with his eye the beam of light. The small man was clad in a blue suit, but it was not the uniform which he was entitled to wear as Chief of Police of Skokum.

The red hair was thinly disarranged. A soft hat lay nearby. Sandell was crouched around a tent stake, as though he had been trying to drag himself up when he died.

His clothing was disarranged slightly, Doc noted mechanically. There was a dust mark of some kind on one shoulder-blade. Doc thrust the flashlight closer, examining the body with utmost care. He was all surgeon now, noting that the small man had been well made, that his ribs were covered with a pad of muscle. The wound was a knife thrust, straight to the heart, delivered from the rear. A cowardly blow, but shrewd. Doc examined the slit in the blue jacket, the shirt. The instrument had been very sharp and quite slender, like a poniard. Such weapons were rare around a carney. . . .

He looked again at the powdery mark. He shook his head and went around to the front of the tent. Abe was making his bally. The woman, Joan Clausen, merely smiled when Dolores Fanchon gave with a grind and a

bump before slinking off the runway and disappearing within the tent. All the Clausen did was lift a shoulder and the line formed, fighting to give Abe a chance to short change them.

THE little man who had been robbed was not in sight, but the Sheriff lounged beside the juice joint across the way, where red-headed Lola sold cold liquid made from flookum and called it fresh pineapple. Lola was tough and could take care of herself and Crum, too, Doc knew. He edged close to Abe's high booth and muttered as the line dwindled, "Come around back."

Jumper was down the midway, holding up a grease joint, his hand full of a hamburger, which was dwarfed in his mighty grasp. The carnival was swinging into high for the night. Doc shuddered at thought of what would happen when Chief of Police Sandell turned up dead in the midst of all this. He went back to the corpse and absently brushed the powder off the blue suit. He had been fond of Sandell. The little cop had always been on the level and had respected other people who conducted themselves the same way.

There were quiet footsteps and then Abe was goggling at the corpse. Abe said, "Geez, Doc, I never seen anything so quick. Honest, he was out front, givin' the new broad the double-o and he went inside and I t'ought he was still ganderin' the act. Geez, Doc, he's the head John Law in the boig. Geez, Doc, what t' hell we do now, huh?"

Doc said, "When did he go inside the tent?"

"The last show," said Abe. "He came late. I was peekin' an' I seen him—jus' like the other yokels, ganderin' the new broad. . . ."

"Clausen is on, then off. Maybe she shows for twenty seconds the first time. Then she strips for the bubble act and thirty seconds later it's a curtain," said Doc. He eschewed carney talk when possible, but sometimes the expressions saved time when conversing with one of the troupe. Abe was his most trusted employee. He said, "We'll have to move him or they'll slough the show quick. I want some time. There's a heap of canvas over yonder. Give me a hand."

Abe said, "Geez, Doc, you got the noive. I—I'm scared of corpses, Doc. But if you got the noive. . . ." He was shaking like a leaf. Whiskey had him these many years and his nerves were unreliable, Doc knew. He pushed the barker aside. "Just keep a watch," he grunted. He bent and put his powerful arms around the slight body. He lifted the Chief loose from the tent stake and walked across the space between the Venus tent and the canvas under which many of the roustabouts



lived. Abe, still shaking, lifted the corner of a canvas folded many times. It was like filing secret document to slip the small, still form into the heap between two folds.

Abe said, "Holy gee! Let's scam."

They went like two ghosts, back to the Venus tent. The show was over and Dolores was sticking her head out the flap, looking for Abe. Doc growled, "Now keep your head. Stay away from Dolores until you cool off or she'll know something is wrong."

Abe said, "Since I put the new broad on, somethin' is very wrong. But ain't she really got it, that Clausen? Wowie! I wish I was eddicated up to that stuff!"

Doc said viciously, "I don't know myself, but I'll find out."

He pounded away. He went over to the trailer and Joey was bug-eyed at his long absence. Doc climbed onto the platform, switched on his lights, cleared his throat and went to work. He felt, rather than saw, that Crum and Jumper were working their way toward him from different directions. He went on smoothly, without losing a bit of banter or a touch of lightness from his spiel. He managed to pretend he did not see the two limbs of the law, but he wondered agonizedly if they would really close him up and make arrests.

They sneered in the background, but when he began selling the Home Remedy at a dollar a crack and when they counted the percentage of his sales, they stopped grinning and were impressed. A couple of small town grifters, even though Jumper may have been big time once, they could multiply this take with the others they knew he must make in a year and come up with a respectable sum. Plus the fact that he owned the show. . . .

Jumper said sotto voce, "What a roll the Governor is totin' around, Boss."

In the same stage whisper, Crum said with heavy jocularly, "Mebbe he needs some pertection. Mebbe he'd be willin' t' pay for it."

Joey muttered, "Them grifters. Them small town punks and their crazy act."

"Shut things up for the night," snapped the Doc. "I won't play the last show. Snap into it!"

He swung down from the platform. He always worked in his shirt sleeves, whatever the weather, rolling them up for the locals to admire his tremendous biceps. He slung his jacket over a shoulder while he slowly wound down his cuffs. He said, "Anything wrong, Sheriff?"

"Naw," said Crum, his ill nature coming to the surface. "We're jest sick o' seein' you rake in the graft."

"Naturally," said Doc serenely, though he knew he should be buttering them up

against the fatal discovery which was bound to occur. "Any graft you don't get makes you hungry." He walked away from them.

IT WAS nearing the closing hour and something had to be done. It would never do to let them discover the body of Sandell and have the Sheriff take over. Crum would undoubtedly put Doc under bond and thereby stymie the show for days, maybe weeks. Furthermore there were razorbacks on the show—like every other circus or carney—who could not stand a shake-down by John Law.

He had to do something. Doc kept his shows together by his ability to square all beefs and to take care of his employees, no matter how humble. In the tough years, this made the difference between success and failure and Doc had always been successful. True, he had never had a Chief of Police stabbed to death on his lot. . . .

He kept coming back to the Venus In Soap-Suds tent, skulking around in the background, occasionally pausing to talk to Lola among her juices. The murder had taken place there—he wanted to know why. He asked Lola cautiously if she had seen Sandell and she replied that he had exchanged a pleasant word with her, then had made for the girl show.

He shook his head, wondering. Sandell had humanely been interested in the girls, of course. Perhaps he had caught a glimpse of the sophisticated Clausen. He wheeled abruptly and went past Abe, into the tent. The suds were working again. When it was over and the rubes were wending their way out, he slid past the drop and among the little cubicles which served as dressing rooms for the few principals of the act. Dolores said in a screech, "Doc! I wanna see you!"

He said curtly, "Don't clown with me, Dolores, Tell it to Abe. Where's Clausen, the new one?"

"Dammit he better not be with Abe," Dolores whined.

Doc said, "You're all alike. You'd love it. Give you somethin' to holler about." He watched her go. She was willowy, young, tall, with all the things in the proper places, but she just did not have it. For carneys, yes. For anything better, no. That was the difference and there was no two ways about it. . . . He saw the lithe form of Joan Clausen going for the rear tent flap and sauntered after, not trying to overtake her.

He lingered out back, watching her. She walked up and down smoking a cigaret which she kept close, guarding the lighted end with her cupped palm. She had a dark cloak thrown around her and she paced like the panther over in the wild life show and it was obvious she was expecting someone. The

Doc got further into the shadows, utilizing a fold in the tent. The woman was waxing more nervous with very moment.

He stepped out, finally, walking up behind her. He said, "Waiting for someone?"

She leaped three feet away and came down spraddle-legged, as though she held a gun on him. He took no chances. He went into action like a whirlwind, snatching at her wrists as he threw his bulky shoulders into her middle. They flew together across eight feet of ground and she did not cry out, but her curses were in his ears as he pinned her against a wagon wheel.

He straightened her out and the cloak fell open. She was wearing a bra and a g-string and she said, "Damn you, lay off me, Doc, or I'll holler cop."

"On the carney we holler Rube," said Doc coldly. He saw that she did not have a weapon. He said, "If you were waiting for Abe, you'll have to beat Dolores' time."

She said, "It's none of your damned business who I was waiting for."

"You're a nasty old man," she accused flatly. "Go to hell." She ran past him and was gone before he could recover from that unkindest thrust of all.

Old! He went back to the girl tent in a frenzy of rage. He darted within the cubicles backstage and began going through them. He found that of the new girl with her suit still hanging from a wire hanger. He waited wishing she would come and dress, anxious from bitterness to get another harsh word with her.

Under the leather bag which contained her belongings there was a hard object. It was wrapped in a handkerchief and the edges were stained. He brought it into the gleam of the single electric bulb strung inside the tent.

It was a wrist watch. It bore an inscription, "To the Chief of Police of Skokum. . ."

He handled it gingerly, putting it back inside the handkerchief. He started to replace the bundle beneath the case where he had found it. He heard the woman's voice outside, and Abe, answering her, "You'll be all right in here, baby, if I'm here. Don't you worry 'bout nothin'. Me an' the Doc'll handle any trouble around this here lot, see?"

She said, I'm sure you will. . . ."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Low Bridge!

HE STUFFED the tell tale bundle into his pocket and ducked out under the slack of the tent. He circled and came back alongside the Ferris wheel. He strolled on the midway where the crowd was thinning to drunks and

late callers from other parts who were good for only a half hour or so. His head was whirling.

He saw that Joey had made fast the trailer containing his platform and Home Remedy stock. He went on by, going slowly around, always circling the grounds. He was half hopeful that this way he might see a pickpocket in action. If he was only lucky enough to catch Charlie Drew's emissary doing his stuff, a hey Rube would do the rest. Anyone would talk rather than endure a going over from the carney people . . . anyone who knew what it meant to undergo that ordeal.

He came around to the rear of the tent where the roustabouts stayed and despite himself he shivered at thought of the slim police official slumbering under the canvas. He had seen death in many forms both during his days in medicine, and also since coming with the carnivals, but it was always something new, a shock to some inner sensibility to see an acquaintance cut down in his prime.

They stepped out and took him without a struggle. They were huge, and they knew their stuff. Each had an elbow and a wrist before he could bring his great strength into play. He could not wrest away from them and they put nippers on him which would have made it extremely painful to try. Then Jumper alone held him while Crum grunted, stood back and said, "So it's murder, huh? A Sunday School show, you calls it! Ha!"

The body of Sandell was stretched on a blanket within the circle of light from a lone bulb. They had brought the strand outside. Doc saw at once that it was the same line which had been within the dressing room of the girls. Something clicked in his mind. He relaxed and Jumper chuckled. "Fight's gone out of him," the deputy said contemptuously. "Stand up there, you runt. I'm goin' through you for weapons."

Doc stood quite still. Jumper hauled out the handkerchief and watch almost at once, whistling long and low, he handed them gleefully to Crum.

The sheriff said, "I know that watch. Chipped in t' give it to Sandy. Why, you dirty little devil, I oughta. . . ." He stepped forward, balancing a black-jack, his fat face black with rage.

Jumper said, "And don't pull no Hey Rube, neither chum, or I'll ventilate you with a mere .45, get me? You're comin' down and be interviewed at our lil ole jail, you cheap carney bum."

"Murderin' Sandy fer his watch an' his poke!" Crum shook his head, wheezing and grunting.

Doc said calmly, "You saw my take tonight. Does it seem possible I'd knock off a copper for any such miserable sum? I found him and

I found the watch and handkerchief and was looking around for you . . ."

"That's a damn lie," said Jumper. "I been folleyin' you around for the past hour. You been noseyin' thassall. Lookin' for pockets t' pick, no doubt." He jerked the nippers and Doc's wrist hurt. His other arm was free and he doubled his fist. He had seen figures creeping in the shadows. Abe had not forgotten the warning, nor had Gert, nor Lola.

Crum said, "I'll send an ambulance out for Sandy . . . Chuck this bum into the car and we'll take him down and rubber hose him. I'll learn him. . . ."

Doc gritted his teeth at the pain as the nippers closed down again. He put his weight against them deliberately, courting the pain. As he had expected, the hurt almost made him faint when Jumper opposed with all his weight.

He went back again, going Jumper's way. He shouted, "Hey, Rube!"

Jumper, caught by the reversal of Doc's weight, staggered. For one second his pressure on the twister cuff was lost. Doc's left arm swept around, his hand grasping Jumper's brawny throat.

Crum gasped, "Hey, now!" Four big razorbacks seemed to come out of the ground. Each had a white handkerchief around his arm and bore a large club. Crum said, "Now don't you start nothin' with me. I'm the sheriff!"

Abe said, "Eekey okey, Sheriff. Just hold still for it, thassall."

Doc had Jumper against the tent pole. His fist beat twice into Jumper's face, then he jerked the gun from Jumper's belt. He stepped back, his right arm dangling in pain.

Doc wheeled and said to Abe, "The new broad. Where is she?"

"She gimme the highball," said Abe. "She seen 'em snatch ye. She come lammin' over and we started roundin' up. You want her right now, Gov'nor?"

Doc said, "I think I want her right now."

Jumper's mouth was bleeding. He said thickly, "By God, I'll see you fry."

**I** DON'T think so," said Doc. He was calm now. He grabbed Jumper's lapels and threw him over alongside Crum. The sheriff had not budged since the carneys had ringed him. His fat face was like putty. Jumper seemed unafraid, but Crum was scared of his hide.

Abe came with the woman. She walked past Sandell's body, staring down, moving slowly, coming to where Doc waited. She was still clad in the cloak. He said to her quietly, "You were waiting for him?"

She said, "You guessed it."

Doc wheeled and said, "I got to clear this up. Crum, do you want to talk?"

The sheriff said, "Now, you be careful, Doc. I'm the law around here and you already got one murder. . . ."

Doc said, "I lost five thousand dollars in cash today. A man got his pocket picked on my lot, and we don't carry dips with this show. We don't even short change. I've seen Abe call back a decent looking customer and give them walkaway dough which any municipal-charity box office will pocket without turning a hair. We always run a square show, and here outside Skokum we begin collecting things like that. It's dead wrong."

Jumper said, "You lost five gees! You're full of . . ."

Doc said, "You talk a big game, Jumper. You're a former big time operator, they tell me. I wonder why you're in Skokum? No good reason, I'll bet."

The carneys were listening intently, not understanding it all, but behind the Governor to a man. Abe had them marshalled so that no lurker could see what transpired within the circle. The new woman was pale but steady. She said, "I was stranded in this burg. A show folded and I got my pocket picked at the Greater White Way carney. I followed them here and went broke trying to figure out the lay. It's a cinch Charlie Drew is on that carney. . . ."

"I know," said Doc.

"I breezed into Sandell's office," she said. "He was a nice guy."

Doc said, "I know."

"We talked about this and that. I wanted to get Charlie Drew—I don't even know the old crook, but who hasn't heard of him on the road? I wanted to get a stake and make it back to Broadway. I can still get a club job," she said defiantly. "I've got pals on the Main Stem."

"Sure," said Abe the Barker eagerly. "You're big time, baby, we know that." Dolores caught his eye and he shut his mouth tight but failed to quail. He was watching the lawmen and running the muscle guys and it was his time to strut.

Crum said, "We don't haff to listen to this dame, Doc. You better turn us a-loose an' give up. You got a dead man here."

The woman said, "Sandell knew some things. He knew the way Charlie Drew operated. He told me to watch for it. A man got his pocket picked tonight . . ."

Doc said, "I know that, too. I know the way Charlie works. I know he has two operators at least. And I think I remember the other thing. The mark."

She stared at him. "I saw it. I saw it put on the little man."

Doc said, "I was hoping somebody saw it."

She said, "And it looks as though Sandell was stabbed."

## KILLERS' CARNIVAL

"Low Bridge!" The call came from Abe's startled lips. "Nail the gee!"

Doc was already ducking under. He saw the blade shine and pull away. A razorback swung a club, but the giant was stronger and quicker than Doc had thought. He was running for the sheriff's car. Crum was yelling, "Hey, lemme loose. You can't do this away t' me. I'm the sheriff."

"Hold him," Doc said tersely. "Don't let him go." He had Jumper's revolver in his hand. He knelt, sighting along the barrel. It was a Colt, an old Frontier model, a .45, as Jumper had boasted. He lined it on Jumper's leg and pressed the trigger with loving satisfaction.

The deputy was just getting into the car. The bullet smashed into his calf. He spun around twice and sat down heavily on the ground, both hands going to his leg. His face was green with shock when Doc came near. The girl, alongside Doc, said, "He's dangerous as a rattler. . . . Look out for his knife."

Doc held the gun level and said, "Drop the shiv, Jumper. I'd pot you for luck. Right where it would hurt for a long, long time before they got a doctor to you."

The blazing eyes met Doc's and for a moment he thought the man would leap at him on one leg. Then the big hand opened and the knife fell to earth. It was a clasp-knife. Doc picked it up gingerly and looked at it. He said, "I see. The auger. He's had it sharpened to a stiletto effect. . . . Slid it into Sandell when the Chief caught him on that chalk dodge. That was chalk on Sandell's coat."

She said, "It was Crum chalked them."

Doc raised his eyebrows. He stared at the hands on Jumper. Then he turned and looked at Crum, between two big razorbacks. Crum's hands were stubby and fat and useless. Jumper's were big, but they were strong.

The girl said, "Crum saw where they carried their bank roll. Then he chalked them on the shoulder. If they had it in their right hand pocket, he put it on their lapel. If in their hip pocket, on their shoulder blade. Then Jumper crowded the victim. I'll show you."

**S**HE was lost in the effect she was creating, Doc thought glumly. She had stolen the play. He knew now, how it was done. But he had to let her go, or he had to stop her before them all, and he had not quite the guts to do it.

She said, "I saw him from the stage. . . . Jumper would slip his two fingers into a pocket—that little man's pocket, it was. Then when the little man walked away, the lining would come out. Walk away, Doc!"

She had her index finger and the next one



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## DETECTIVE TALES

in his pocket. He walked away, and sure enough the pocket came inside out. She said triumphantly, "He worked it at our show, when attention was distracted. I was going to tell Sandell. I went out to meet him and Sandell was dead!"

It was dramatic, but there was no other evidence except the knife. Doc balanced the weapon. He said, "Abe, go send a wire to the nearest F.B.I. office. We've cleaned up all the law in this country. They say they have got ways of tracing blood stains down into the haft of a knife." He stared at Jumper. Then he went close to the big deputy. Pain was bringing sweat to his brow. Doc looked down at him and said softly, "I always mark my money. I marked the money I gave Crum for a bribe. I do it with green engraver's ink. Just three little letters along the edge of the art work somewhere. It's a hobby. I lost five thousand dollars in large bills today." He grabbed Jumper's coat and stuffed his hand into the inner pocket.

He held up the money. He counted it and said, "Didn't even spend it. He had the little Clem's money to spend. Nice fella, this Jumper. Got you into trouble Crum. Makes you an accessory to murder, doesn't it?"

Crum stared about. The hard faces of the carney folk were impassive. He turned away from his deputy and covered his face with his fat, useless hands. He sobbed, "I did not. I did not kill him. He was after Jumper, not me. I'll tell it all. I'll tell it to the F.B.I."

The carneys guarded the two big men. Doc walked across the lot, counting his money again. He was aware of the girl, but he tried to ignore her.

She said, meekly, "Can I stay with the show?"

"I'll give you a stake," he said, "and I mean give, not loan. You can go back to the big time."

She said, "I'd rather learn this business. I think I could put on another girl show. . ."

He handed her a hundred dollar bill, hesitated, thrust two more upon her. He said, "Tomorrow. The train from Skokum."

She took the money unwillingly, looking at him out of the corners of her slanting eyes. She said, "I'll have to stick around and testify, remember?"

He said, "Here's another hundred for that." He gave it to her and ran up the steps and into his trailer. He locked the door. He sat down on his bunk and counted to ten. He said, "Whoosh! It's a damned good thing I swore off them for life." He went to bed, shutting his eyes firmly, wooing sleep.

It took him a hell of a while to win it.

THE END

## KNUCKLE-BUSTER

(Continued from page 30)

There was a hole a mile wide in Sorkin's reasoning, so I ordered another bottle of beer and then explained it to him patiently.

"Lieutenant, you've got hold of your own tail. You say somebody fixed up Rettzo's car and then killed Manuel to shut him up. But you've still got to prove who put the knuckle on, and you can't do that. Because according to your own theory, the only guys who can tell you are dead: Rettzo himself and Manuel."

I shrugged. "I won't buy it, and I don't think any jury would either."

Sorkin drained his glass of beer. Then he wiped his mouth. And after that he hauled a couple of photographs from under his jacket, and handed them across the table. But they didn't mean much to me. They looked like those magnified "What-is-it?" pictures in the magazines that turn out to be butterfly wings or sugar lamps.

He pointed to one. "This is what that nut from the steering knuckle looks like magnified two hundred times. And this is the inside face of that box wrench I borrowed from you this morning. I think even a jury would be impressed by those pictures. In fact, I'll lay you ten to one our technician could convince them that your wrench tightened that nut."

The beer wasn't setting so good on my stomach now, but I managed an indifferent shrug. "Okay, so I admit I fixed a car once for a friend. That still leaves Manuel to account for, and I've got a couple of other friends who will tell you where I was last night."

Sorkin actually smiled, the first time I'd ever seen him. "Who's chasing whose tail now?"

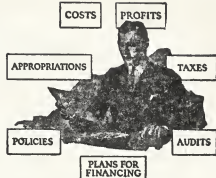
I exploded. "You think my alibi won't hold up against a couple of killers with police records and a grudge to settle!"

Sorkin nodded. "Carney and Motta have pretty good alibis this time. They've both been in the County Hospital since yesterday afternoon. Their brakes gave out on Hill Street just after they left your place. You know how hydraulic brakes are."

He might as well have kicked me below the belt. Yes, I did know how those brakes were, because I'd worked on them. But that had been a couple of months ago, and I'd forgotten all about it.

Sorkin was watching me. I looked at the beer bottle, but thought better of it. It was a swell joint I'd picked for lunch: it was swarming with hungry cops.

Sorkin got up and I did too—but not because I wanted to.



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## DEADFALL

killed, and that's exactly what happened.

"We didn't have much to go on. Only way we could figure when she'd been killed was the day the papers and the milk started piling up on her porch. That made it come out March 21st. And you'd been in jail since March 18th, Slade, for as silly a crime as a smart crook ever committed. And when I had time to think about it, I remembered that your wife looked pretty happy when the judge gave you a five-year rap."

There was a lighted window across the court, and there was movement and a vague glinting from under the drawn blind. Sam was in line with it, but Slade was too far to one side to be in Ike Patterson's sight.

"So your wife gave you an alibi. She did a good job too—the papers were unfolded and read, and the milk bottle emptied, washed and put out. She gave you time to get safe in jail, before we found the murder."

Sam stared somberly at Slade, seeing him less than the picture his own words had drawn—the picture of a white-faced girl in a big dark house, taking in milk bottles and papers with carefully gloved hands, afraid to be seen or to leave, afraid to open any of the doors within for deadly fear of what might be behind them.

"Very pretty story," Slade said.

"It wasn't going to be," said Sam O'Dell. "You were going to kill her too. You knew something was afoot when we sprung you—you couldn't leave her alive, knowing what you'd done."

Slade laughed. "You think anybody'll believe that?"

"No, I don't," said Sam. "But I thought maybe if I let you see I knew it too, you might not feel like you had to kill her."

Myra's hand came around with the pepper canister. Her fingers had fumbled the top off, and a stinging cloud hit Sam squarely in the face.

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## DETECTIVE TALES

"Run, Carl!" she cried. "Get away!"

He fired once blindly, and knew that he'd missed when the knife blade seared his upflung arm. But that was what he'd wanted, to bring Slade into line with the windows. Sam dropped to the floor, but Slade dived down at him, and again the knife bit, this time in Sam's wrist.

He'll make it next time, Sam thought.

He shoved the man away, managed to work his foot up under him, and straightened his leg in a convulsive heave. For an instant through tear-clouded eyes he saw the killer poised, spread-eagled above him, in Patterson's sight for no more than a flick of time. There was an ear-shattering roar, and the crash of glass at the window. Carl Slade's head seemed to dissolve, and a red torrent came down on Sam O'Dell.

He got to his feet as the man's body crumpled. He knew that he was blood-spattered and ghastly, but he knew that Slade was worse. Scrubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his coat, he crossed the room to Myra and took her shoulders, turning her around to face the wall. Beneath his fingers her muscles were jumping hysterically. He spoke over her shoulder.

"Nothing to do about it," he said. "He was right; we couldn't convict him. We had to give him rope—that's why we turned him loose." His voice was harsh and gritty with strain. "He'd have killed you in another minute."

"Yes," she said, "I know. But I married him. I think if I could have learned to love him, he might not have gone so bad. But I—"

He could hear them now, Mason and Patterson on the stairs, and there were only seconds left. He tightened his grip on her shoulders.

"You didn't know what was in that house!" he said.

"Till I read the papers."

"Forget that part! You didn't know. Go back to your job and forget it. Slade's paid for it, and that's all we wanted. Start over now. Don't be afraid."

She brought her hand up then, to rest for an instant on his fingers. Her voice was steady and composed now—better than Sam's.

"If you say so," she said. And "I'm sorry about your eyes."

"Don't be," he told her. He fumbled for a card and shoved it into her hand. "If you need to talk sometime, call me."

Patterson and Mason were in the room now, and the soft pressure of her fingers was the only answer she made.

## THE CRIME CLINIC

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A colored youth, Willie Francis, was sentenced to death in the electric chair for the murder of a St. Martinville, La. druggist which occurred in the early part of this year. Everything proceeded according to schedule in the death house. The priest had a few final moments with Willie, they led him to the chair, hooded him, and strapped him to it. Only too soon, the electrocutioner stepped back and pulled the fatal switch—and nothing happened! Willie was still alive and breathing!

Young Willie has been granted a reprieve, since, the case has been handed to the United States Supreme Court for review. Temporarily, Willie is safe in jail and as he told it to one reporter, this is the story of the happening:

"They walked me into the room and I saw the chair and sat down on it . . . I tried to remember what Father Hannigan told me in my cell, about being a lucky fella to know when I was going to die. He told me most people don't know and some of them ain't ready, like those who get smashed by trucks on the road and those who die between clean sheets by surprise, right in their own homes.

"But all I could think was: 'Willie, you're going out this world.'

"They begun to strap me against the chair and everything begun to look dazey in the room. It was like the folks watching was in a big swing and they'd swing back and then right up close to me where I could hear them breathing.



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## DETECTIVE TALES

"The electric man said, 'Good-bye, Willie.' He could have been putting me on a bus for New Orleans, the way he said it, and I tried to say good-bye, but my tongue got stuck in peanut butter and I felt a burning in my head and my left leg and I jumped against the straps. "When the straps kept cutting me, I hoped I was alive and I asked the electric man to let me breathe. That's when they took the bag off my head."

A kind word never hurt anybody, and lots of people, including us, rather like it. We also don't mind a bit of honest criticism. A little of both came to us recently in a letter from Wilbur Jones, one of our readers from northern Pennsylvania, which we quote in part below.

Editor, *Detective Tales*  
 Sir:

As a reader of detective fiction, I have been intending to write you for some time and tell you some of the things I like about your magazine, and a couple that I don't.

Taking the September issue as a starter, the big thing that impressed me was the unusual amount of variety in story backgrounds. Just considering the lead novel and the three novelettes, each one offered a completely different world for the reader to move in: *Dames Are Deadly!* with its penthouse panorama, *Remains-to-Be-Seen!* which is set in a conservative wealthy man's domain; *Death Hits the Daily Double* with its race track locale; and finally, *Cross Country Kill* which takes one into the very heart of Sheriff Lovatt's southern country. I had several evenings of solid enjoyment in pursuing my favorite hobby of reading "Detectives," and much of the pleasure was due to your skillful selection of stories.

Now, as I said, here is a beef.

I often wonder why you don't print more stories which give the reader a chance to figure out the plot from the facts shown. What I'm trying to say is that, so often, the killer or criminal tips his hand later on in the plot and the reader isn't given a good chance to play sleuth. I know you'll say, "Look at *Cross Country Kill* or *Dames Are Deadly*. I'll admit that and say that's just what I like—only lets have more of it.

Thank you, Wilbur Jones. May we suggest that you keep an eye peeled for Day Keene's new novel, *Little Miss Murder* and Henry Norton's latest Sheriff Lovatt novelette, two stories which are cut to your specification. Both will appear in the November issue along with a host of other long and short crime stories and features, written by masters of murder-fiction!

The November issue will be published September 27th. THE EDITOR



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